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Democratically Governing School Districts: How Four California School Districts Responded to the Local Control Funding Formula

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by

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Abstract

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A new structure for California education governance and funding, the Local Control Funding Formula, created fresh expectations for transparency, citizen engagement, and amplifying voices that have been previously marginalized. Changing these rules of the game has the potential to profoundly affect education policy decisions and normatively inform best practices for democratic governance.

Drawing upon a mixed methods approach that included a survey instrument, document analysis, observation, and semi-structured interviews around the state capital and in four California school districts, I found some variance in the implementation of the new law. This has important implications for how California educates its future citizens. I observed wide ranging skill sets among district administrators in how they facilitated meetings, responded to proposals or criticism from the public, and made their communities feel heard. The kind of engagement opportunities district administrators create combined with how the community choses to be involved contributes to a district culture, which affects the conditions for future engagement.

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Chapter One: Introduction

What happens in public schools is something most members of the community know a lot about, having spent years there as students, and perhaps more later as parents of students. Yet, for all the time spent inside the schoolhouse, the public is little involved in how schools are governed (Baldassare, Bonner, Kordus, & Lopes, 2016). When considering that about forty-two percent of California's budget was allocated to K-12 education in 2013-2014,[1] it seems surprising that more residents would not be proactive in having a say in how this money is spent.

Perhaps no local institution in theory and practice is as precious to local communities as its schools. The theory of democratic education advanced by Gutmann (1999) is essentially that communities have a stake in their schools because schools guide the future of the community by shaping the political values, attitudes, and modes of behavior of future residents. Schools are the main institution we rely on to perpetuate democracy by producing democratic citizens who are capable of self-governance. Therefore, the community should have a say in education governance.

That public schools should be reflective and responsive to their communities is deeply embedded into the core of American education. Although citizens may view participation in the governance of schools as a parental duty rather than a political act, how schools engage their communities and the impact that public input has on governing and policy decisions carry intense political weight and consequence. Given both the

[1] This figure is provided by the California Department of Finance. It refers to General Fund dollars. The state also distributes additional federal funds.

enormous amount of public funds that schools are charged with spending and their democratic purpose, the politics of education is a fitting topic for political science and this dissertation.

California's new education governance structure, the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), attempts to ignite greater community involvement in the governance of schools. It adds new emphasis to the democratic theory of communities shaping their schools, as the LCFF passes much authority from the state to locally elected school boards and county superintendents. This new structure for education governance and funding advances an experiment in transparency that involves engaging citizens, attempting to bring diverse voices to the table, and consciously amplifying voices that have been previously marginalized. Changing these fundamental rules of the game has the potential to profoundly affect education policy decisions and normatively inform best practices for democratic governance.

School district staff are expected to be even more diligent about engaging the public and especially groups who, on average, have not actively participated in school governance – low income families, non-English speakers, and foster youth. Guidelines from Sacramento about how to accomplish this public outreach, planning, and budgeting are minimal, which has led to wide-ranging implementation of the new law, depending on the local context (Humphrey & Koppich, 2014). The most tangible accountability mechanism embedded in the LCFF is that districts must be considerate about reaching out to constituents for their input on planning and budgeting and be transparent about this process by publishing a Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP). Districts must

convene LCFF advisory committees to give input on the LCAP and must make the LCAP available for public comment at school board meetings.

Designers of the LCAP requirement knew that this accountability mechanism alone would not inspire widespread community engagement. Other worries in the design stage of the new policy were that that LCFF advisory committees would very much resemble the same group of parents that are already active in their children's education. Furthermore, those who take the time to examine an LCAP and show up at board meetings to comment are likely already the citizens with the ability and desire to take part in the governance process.

Although the LCFF may not have created a windfall of democratic participation, it has promise for building momentum for more robustly engaging citizens in the future as school districts and interest groups become more skillful at mobilizing their constituents and build capacity to do so. This dissertation draws findings from the first three years of LCFF implementation that have important implications for citizen engagement and democratic governance broadly, and education policy specifically.

I watched the bargaining and debate of LCFF enactment in 2013 and the development of the LCAP in 2014 up close as a staff member of the California School

Boards Association (CSBA).[2] When it became clear that the Legislature would enact the LCFF, the new law became a top priority of CSBA and most other education stakeholder groups in Sacramento. This gave me the unique vantage point of attending State Board of Education meetings and occasionally standing in for principals or tagging along to LCFF strategy meetings.[3]

The LCFF presents the opportunity to study how changing the rules of the game affects – and just as importantly – does not affect – the incentives, interests, identities, and capacities of citizens to participate in the governance of their local school districts. The guiding questions of this dissertation are: 1) Given the requirements and incentives for community engagement embodied in the LCFF, how have different types of districts responded? 2) What factors explain variations in these responses?

To answer these questions, I first trained my focus on Sacramento to understand expectations of policymakers as the new law was being enacted and the politics of the debate. Focusing first on enactment is important because implantation will vary depending on how practitioners interpret the expectations and tools of implementation they are given (McLaughlin, 1987; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). Doing so gave me a baseline for what

[2] CSBA is a membership driven nonprofit organization that provides policy resources and training for school boards. The organization also puts substantial resources into legislative advocacy to typically influence policy to give more autonomy and less regulation to local school districts. Nearly all California's school boards are members of CSBA. I served in the small think tank wing of CSBA. My main role as a Policy and Programs Officer was to help school boards identify ways to improve the learning conditions of their students, such as to implement practices like a universal breakfast program, time for physical activity, or increasing quality out-of-school learning time.

[3] I left CSBA in early 2016 in part to write this dissertation. To check my objectivity, I sometimes called upon policy players from multiple stakeholder groups to talk through my conclusions.

policymakers were expecting implementation to look like versus what actually occurred across four districts.

The second phase of my study took me to four Northern California school districts to see the LCFF in practice. In order of size I call my case study districts Large Urban District 1, Large Urban District 2, Affluent Suburban District, and High Need Suburban District. The similarities and differences among these districts enhanced my findings. I will give a brief description of the districts later in the chapter. This dissertation pays close attention to the districts' strategies for community participation and through a survey tool I collected a few dozen snapshots of participants' feelings towards the district.

The Local Control Funding Formula

The new law was a priority of Governor Brown and came in the form of Assembly Bill 97 (AB 97). The two guiding principles of the LCFF are equity and local control. The equity piece is operationalized by redistributing the state's education dollars to give more money to districts that serve high populations of students from low-income families, English learners, and foster youth.[4] The education policy community struggled to find a short way to refer to these student populations that the LCFF is attempting to affect.

[4] The actual formula for the funding that districts receive is nuanced. Districts are guaranteed a set amount for the average daily attendance of every student they serve. This was named a base grant. The base grant is adjusted up by about ten percent for students in grades K-3 and about two percent for students in grades 9-12. Districts then receive an additional twenty percent of the adjusted base grant according to how many students they serve who are targeted by the LCFF – students from low income families, English learners, and foster youth. This is known as the supplemental grant. In addition to the base grant and the supplemental grant, districts that have a population of targeted students above fifty-five percent receive an additional fifty percent in the form of a concentration grant.

"Targeted students" has become the most common shorthand. Although imperfect, as some in the policy community expressed distaste of the notion that students would have targets on their back. For lack of a better term, I will follow Sacramento's lead and use the phrase for the ease of the reader.

The local control comes from the deconstruction of California's former system of funding education that created categorical mandates for how districts must allocate dollars. [5] This system was criticized for hampering the decision making ability of local districts. With minimal guidance from Sacramento, under the LCFF, local districts can mostly spend as they see fit.[6] However, all districts must form an advisory committee of parents (or consult with an existing committee) and form an advisory committee for parents of English learners if the district has an English learner population of fifteen percent or more.

Civil rights groups loudly worried to legislative allies that if districts were not held accountable, district budgets would be allocated in ways that did not explicitly serve the targeted students as the law intended. These concerns led to the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), which is a three-year plan that must be adopted by the school

[5] Known as the categorical system, the Legislature allocated pots of money for specific projects, such as physical education or transportation. By 2013 this system was widely unpopular. Chapter Four gives more details about flaws of the categorical approach.

[6] Districts must address eight priorities that were set in state statute: student achievement, school climate, student engagement, parental involvement, course access, implementation of the Common Core, basic services, and other student outcomes. Although all advocates would have liked to get their pet issue included as a priority, in the end the list was not controversial because it broadly encompassed work that districts were already doing and was not overly prescriptive.

board and reviewed and updated every year. I will discuss the theory behind the LCAP in Chapter Three.

The requirement that districts must publish an LCAP is the most tangible accountability mechanism embedded within the LCFF. AB 97 directed the State Board of Education to develop a template to be used by all California districts to show how they planned to use the additional funding they are receiving for the targeted students. The template was meant to invoke transparency and marry budgeting and planning. It also provided guidelines for how districts are to engage their communities in the process.

In short, at the enactment stage, the LCFF broke free of the status quo by more equitably distributing state education funding than in the past and diverting significant governing authority from Sacramento to local districts.

The Central Argument

In enacting the LCFF, the state accomplished a remarkable disruption of past policy monopolies. Prior to the LCFF, local education policy was tightly coupled with what budget dollars were allocated by the state Legislature. Breaking from the status quo is a rare occurrence in the policy world (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). Yet, the LCFF reached the government's decision making agenda when three key factors converged in 2013. First, there was agreement among California residents and policymakers that the current state of California education was inadequate. In Sacramento, stakeholders were widely dissatisfied with the current education governance system, as were practitioners at the local level. Second, Governor Brown introduced and championed a solution to the current problem;

and third, with a bit of bargaining, Governor Brown's solution was acceptable to most stakeholders. How these three phenomena occurred is explained in Chapter Four.

The new law utilized multiple policy instruments to achieve its goal of increased equity and local control - mandates, incentives, capacity building, system changing, and hortatory.[7] These instruments were partly focused on community engagement, as public involvement is a key accountability mechanism that was meant to balance districts' newfound autonomy and is a main focus of this dissertation.

Districts responded to the policy instruments to varying degrees. In general, my four case study districts had been aware of engaging communities as a best practice for improving student achievement, but the LCFF gave the extra nudge they needed to step into action by making it a requirement. But just the mandate alone would have been insufficient to achieve policymakers' goals of more robust community engagement. In addition to the mandate for districts to engage, extra funds gave districts the ability to carry out engagement at a level greater than before and to create opportunities to further build capacity. The local control focus of the new law started to change the mindset of my four districts from appeasing the state to satisfying its communities. Although the intent of the law was well signaled to the local level, the actual requirements of the LCFF for districts to engage its communities were sparse. In many ways, my districts exceeded the requirements of the state statue and State Board of education rules in their outreach efforts.

[7] The first four policy instruments were explained by McDonnell and Elmore (1987). McDonnell (2004) added hortatory policy to the policy toolbox in her book, *Politics, Persuasion, and Educational Testing.* The concept of hortatory policy was originally advanced by Schneider and Ingram (1990).

Three factors had the strongest influence on how successful my districts were in responding to the LCFF policy instruments. First, I observed wide ranging skill sets among district administrators in how they facilitated meetings, responded to proposals or criticism from the public, and made their communities feel heard or discounted. Second is the level and tenor of community involvement. I attended meetings that ranged from festive to cantankerous. Sometimes attendees were civil and sometimes they were combative. Third is pre-established district culture, which is affected by a combination of the first two factors. District culture is driven by the districts' responsiveness as the community comes to perceive it over time and the ways that interest groups mobilize their members to interact with the district

Study Approach and Data Sources

The study described in this dissertation relied upon multiple methods. I used elite interviews and discussions with dozens of elected officials, school district administrators, parents, community activists, and policy makers at the state level; a written survey instrument to capture information from meeting participants; qualitative observation of district meetings and events; and analysis of official documents to investigate my research questions of how four school districts responded to the new law, and the conditions in which engagement occurs, differ across four school districts and who engages and feels heard in the governing of school districts.

My research began with twenty-six qualitative interviews with policymakers or policy influencers who had an impact on enactment of the LCFF in Sacramento.[8] Many of the same informants continue to be active in education politics and are monitoring implementation of the law. Some informants had high profiles in the process, such as serving in key decision-making positions. I identified and invited other potential interviewees to participate in my study through recommendations from education policy insiders, as well as through my own knowledge of the California education community.

Interviews with policymakers and policy influencers allowed me to understand the intent and expectations of the LCFF designers and the strategies of statewide advocacy groups as they relate to local districts. With few exceptions, policymakers and advocates accommodated my meeting requests and shared their time generously. These meetings often had a snowballing effect and my list of potential interviews grew as a result. My interviews with professionals working around Sacramento created a base of knowledge from which to consider how local districts understood the new law as they were putting it into practice and proved useful when I conducted eighteen more interviews with people working to implement the LCFF at the district level in the second phase of my research.

Approximately sixty percent of my interviewees were in statewide positions and forty percent were working at the local level. In a few instances, they were working both to influence statewide policy decisions, as well as policy decisions in one or more of my case study districts. Table 1.1 displays the number of interviewees per how I categorized their identity.

[8] See Appendix A for more explanation of this method.

Table 1.1: Interviewee Identities

Position	N
State Government (anyone with a ".gov" email address)	8
Statewide Associations (represent dues paying members)	5
Civil Rights Groups (a loose coalition of organizations that look out for the rights of children)	10
District Level (board member, superintendent, community member, etc. across my four case study districts)	18
Misc. (press, researcher, county official, etc.)	4

In the second phase of my study, although overlapping with the first, I employed a case study approach to investigate the implementation of the new law at the local level.[9] Case studies provided the opportunity to develop a greater understanding of what districts' community engagement really looks like and revealed nuances of how engagement differs according to local contexts. I systematically chose four districts so as to be able to compare them in most-similar, as well as most-different fashions. Thus, my conclusions are relevant for future engagement efforts in large urban districts, suburban districts, and for districts serving heterogeneous and homogeneous student populations. I will explain my logic for choosing these districts after detailing my choice of methods.

To understand the intent of district officials in their outreach efforts and how it is perceived by the community I conducted interviews with twenty-four local informants; observed twenty-three meetings among district administrators, school board members,

[9] Case studies combine multiple methods and focus on depth over breadth. Furthermore, they utilize the principle of triangulation, which emphasizes the value of testing hypotheses with different methods that do not share the same methodological weaknesses (de Vaus, 2001).

and members of the community; surveyed forty-three meeting participants; and analyzed districts' LCAPs and other related documents. My research started in the second year of implementation of the new law, which allowed me to look retrospectively at the first year of the LCFF implementation (2013-2014 school year), and observe the second and third years of implementation (2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years) in real time.

Important for developing a sense of local culture was being present at school board meetings, LCFF specific meetings, and other district events. Culture is at the heart of ethnographic research and is commonly framed as the acquired knowledge that people use to interpret experience and generate social behavior (Spradley, 1979). I took copious notes about what I was witnessing and how I saw elected officials and board members interacting with citizens. Over the course of this study, I attended twenty-one separate meeting events to see first-hand how district officials interact with community members.[10]

I developed a survey tool to collect information from meeting attendees, which I knew would include parents and community leaders.[11] The survey collected information, such as how often respondents are involved with the district, their motivations for attending meetings, and their feelings about district responsiveness. The survey proved especially useful for identifying who was in the room when issues were being discussed and decided. I often walked into board meetings to a sizeable crowd. However, by circulating the survey it became clear that what appeared to be a healthy turnout from the

[10] There were many more meetings to attend than the twenty-one that I was present for. I attempted to attend meetings across the four districts as evenly as possible. This was complicated by important meetings being held on the same day, as well as some districts holding more meetings than others.

[11] See Appendix C.

community was really district staff who were compelled to attend as part of their duties. The survey also captured how often respondents attend meetings.

To have a sample of how lay citizens feel about district outreach and governing decisions, as opposed to community members with a direct role in the LCFF process, I administered a survey at nine meetings across the four districts where I expected substantial attendance from citizens without official duties within the district, such as board meetings or public forums. Although open to the public, official LCAP advisory meetings tended not to attract the public at large; therefore, I refrained from distributing the survey at these meetings.

Small turnout at LCFF advisory committee meetings versus larger turnout at other district meetings is likely explained by the different level of publicity each was given. Districts generally asked their LCAP advisory committees to weigh in on nuanced budgeting and planning decisions that were devised according to community and stakeholder input that was collected during the LCFF listening campaigns. This sometimes deliberative work was made easier by keeping the group small.

Four Case Studies

I spent over a year in four different school districts investigating and observing how each governing authority engages its community. As the American Political Science Association Task Force on Civic Engagement stated, “Place matters for civic engagement” (Macedo, 2005, 67). Spending time attending meetings, speaking with participants, and observing gave me an important sense of the governance culture in each district. Getting to

know each district in person also allowed me to capture telling snapshots of what it is like to be engaged and participate there.

I selected my four districts based on independent variables that the civic engagement literature suggests are important factors in influencing who participates and who is heard: district size, household income, and English speaking ability. To a lesser extent, I also considered known political activism within the districts I selected.

Before dealing with the independent variables I systematically narrowed down where to look geographically. I selected five counties in Northern California and recorded in a matrix all unified districts[12] in those counties between 10,000 and 50,000 students.[13] While there is likely to be a difference in governing a district with 10,000 students and 50,000, casting the net this widely produced a better sample size from which to work. I assumed that districts of about 10,000 students or more have a substantial administrative capacity and districts of 50,000 will look much like a district of 10,000, but on a larger scale. This proved to be true in my observations.

The California Department of Education's Data Reporting Office makes disaggregated student data readily available. When selecting my case studies, I used the most recent data at the time, which was from the 2013-2014 school year. Through an online tool made available by the California Department I could view and organize unified school districts by student enrollment. After studying these data, I eliminated one of the

[12] Unified districts offer elementary through high school education.

[13] As a resident of Northern California, it was important to be in reasonable driving distance to each district to conduct interviews, observe meetings, and get a feel for the community. In some instances, I took public transportation, other research missions involved driving for several hours.

five counties from consideration entirely because most districts in that county are not unified. In the end, four counties were included in the matrix for a sampling frame of twenty-one districts. I next included in my search the percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced price meals and students who are considered English learners because these are two groups that the LCFF targets for additional services. I also included data on race/ethnicity.

From my matrix displaying the twenty-one districts in four counties with unified school districts of between 10,000 and 50,000 students I ranked them high to low and low to high for both percentage of English learners and students from low-income families as signaled by qualifying for free and reduced price meals through the National School Lunch Program.[14] A low percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch prices does not necessarily mean that a district serves wealthy communities, but that there is an absence of poverty. The highest English learner population was at thirty-five percent and the lowest was at seven percent. The highest population of students from low-income families was seventy-one percent and the lowest was six percent. From here I considered factors such as race/ethnicity, county government, and known political activity.

Over the last several decades California has turned into an ethnic minority-majority state (Myers, 2012), which is reflected in the demographics of students served by the twenty-one districts in my selection sample. Fifteen of the twenty-one districts have either

[14] Run by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the National School Lunch Program provides either free or reduced-price lunch to children at school, based on their parents' income in relation to the poverty line that is set by the U.S. Census Bureau. Children from families who earn 130 percent or less of the poverty level are eligible for free lunch. Children from families who make between 130 percent and 185 percent of the poverty level are eligible for reduced price lunch, which can be no more than $.40.

a majority or plurality of students identifying as Hispanic or Latino. The other six districts have either a majority or plurality of students identifying as White. Although my sample did not produce any districts with a majority or even a plurality of African American or Asian students, I did note the districts that have significant populations (twenty or more percent) that are not the plurality.

County superintendents are most often elected in California, as is true in all four counties in my sample. They have the responsibility for approving or rejecting a district's LCAP. This important role can influence the understanding and actions of local boards and administrators. County superintendents have played a small role early in the LCFF implementation, but it is assumed that their role will grow (Humphrey & Koppich, 2014). Therefore, I wanted to be aware of not picking four districts in the same county in order to be able to compare directions or support from county offices. Two of the districts I did select are in the same county and two are in a neighboring county.

Political activism is also an independent variable that I considered, but less so than family income and English speaking ability. I considered the term political activism in a general way. Several districts in the matrix stood out for high political activism within the community that would be known to most any political observers. I assumed that this political activism would trickle into school district activity. I also searched local news sources through Google's news search feature with an eye towards school board elections or well reported controversy by the press. My final sample includes two districts that I considered to have a high degree of political activism and two with relatively mild activism. This prediction largely proved true throughout my research.

One of the districts I considered on the high end of the political activism spectrum is in a community with a long and proud tradition of participation in the movement of the day, and protests feel routine. Another district I found to have high political activism is working through a political scandal that resulted in ten candidates vying for two open school board seats.

Two of these districts made the list for highest percentage of English learners and students from low-income families. Given my goal of better understanding how changing governance rules inspires engagement, this was too good of an opportunity to pass up. Both districts have a majority of students who qualify for the National School Lunch Program and also large populations of students who identify as Hispanic, Latino, or African American. I call the first Large Urban District 1 and the second Large Urban District 2.

I chose my third district by selecting one that serves a low percentage of English learners and students receiving free and reduced price lunch prices in addition to having a population of mostly White and Asian students. These factors put it on the opposite side of the spectrum of Large Urban Districts 1 and 2. Also in contrast to Large Urban Districts 1 and 2, this district is in a suburban community. I call this district Affluent Suburban District. The political science literature suggests that the demographics of the citizens in this district lead to political activism. While they may have a high degree of political knowledge, a review of press reports showed this district to be low on political activism directed towards the district. Other than a high turn-over of superintendents, the above average test scores of the district's students leave residents of Affluent Suburban District mostly content.

The final district has a high percentage of English learners and students on free and reduced lunch, serves a student population that is majority Hispanic or Latino, and has a significant number of African American students. It is also located in a suburban community. Press reports revealed mostly positive news about the district and other than raises for district employees, school board politics are non-controversial. These criteria put this district on the furthest side of low political activism of the other three districts and I call it High Needs Suburban District.

The four districts I selected are shown in Table 1.4.

Table 1.2: Case Study District Selection Criteria

District	Student Enrollment	% of English Learners	% Qualify for Free or Reduced Lunch	Race/ethnicity	Political activism in the community
Large Urban District 1	45,000	30	75	Plurality Hispanic/Latino with significant African American	High
Large Urban District 2	30,700	35	70	Majority Hispanic/Latino with significant African American	High
Affluent Suburban District	14,800	5	5	Majority White with significant Asian	Low
High Needs Suburban District	10,800	35	85	Majority Hispanic/Latino with significant African American	Low

Student enrollment was rounded to the nearest 100; percentages of English learners and students qualifying for the National School Lunch Program were rounded to the nearest five.

Organization of the Dissertation

The remainder of this dissertation starts by considering questions of democratic governance and civic engagement. In Chapter Two I borrow Verba, Schlozman, and Brady's (1995) Civic Volunteerism Model of considering political participation through the lenses of Who is able? Who is willing? And who is asked? Although the spirit of the LCFF encouraged school districts to remove barriers to participation and widely cast their engagement nets, few citizens came to the table to participate.

Chapter Three examines the conceptual framework of the LCAP, the LCFF's main accountability mechanism. The LCAP aimed to create a process that provides citizens with information and procedures that empower them to monitor their district's performance and voice their preferences. The document also obligates districts to couple their planning and budgeting processes, which was not commonly practiced prior to the LCFF, and policymakers believed that doing so would make district governance more efficient and effective.

Chapter Four describes how the LCFF reached the California government's decision making agenda, what the law set out to do, and the politics behind it. Kingdon's (1982) agenda setting model provides the framework for explaining how policymakers and Californians understood current problems with governing school districts, available solutions, and the ongoing politics of California education.

In Chapter Five I bridge the gap between enactment of the new law in Sacramento and the implementation at the local level by reviewing extant literature on how implementation is affected by implementers' understanding of what they are expected to

do and McDonnell and Elmore's (1987) categorization of policy instruments. The LCFF is powered by utilizing a combination of instruments including mandates, inducements, capacity building, system changing, and hortatory.

Chapter Six gives an in-depth description of the four Northern California school districts in my case study sample, while Chapter Seven considers telling data points from each district by examining the optimism practitioners felt towards the new law, their difficulties conforming to the LCAP template and experiences of district governing teams collaborating with their communities.

I conclude with recommendations for policymakers and practitioners that will enable the LCFF to achieve its noble purpose of increasing democratic influence of the education of future citizens. The LCFF provides the opportunity to embrace the complexity of governing, the essential democratic role of community groups, and the need for school district governing teams to learn and practice skills that foster high-quality community engagement.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Considerations for Democracy and Schools

Schools and Democracy

Democratically governing school districts presents theoretical as well as practical challenges. Zeigler and Jennings (1974) posited that, as is similar with other governance structures, the governance of schools violates a fundamental principle of democratic institutions. That is, "Instead of the ideal flow of control from the public to its surrogate to the object of control, the process is reversed" (p. 5). In other words, the superintendent establishes policy, which is legitimized by the board of education and then sold to the public.

Democratic theory would submit that this flow should be reversed: The public should indicate policy preferences by electing a school board and the board articulates the public's wishes to the superintendent who carries out the vision. Ideally the public will arrive at a consensus through deliberation. It is less important that the policies resulting from deliberation be the right ones but rather that mutual learning occurs through the exchange of citizens' concerns and values. The democratic ideal of education is achieved when a community is empowered to influence policy that is not repressive and nondiscriminatory (Gutmann, 1999). With policy instruments that are both mandatory and suggestive for how districts engage their communities, the LCFF attempts to emphasize the public in public schools.

At the same time, democratically governing schools necessarily delegates enormous authority to unelected people, as well as the duties of creating opportunities and facilitating forums for the public to deliberate. Whether this delegation maintains

democratic control depends on the mechanisms employed by the citizens and the bureaucracy (Gruber, 1987). In her book exploring democratically controlling bureaucracy, Gruber (1987) observed that:

> Controlling bureaucracies…takes on special urgency in democracies because unaccountable power flies in the face of the central norms of such political systems. When the legitimacy of a government derives from the consent of the governed, the problem becomes not merely an inability to get the governmental apparatus to act in ways the leaders or citizens wish but also a challenge to the fundamental nature of that government. (p. 5)

This challenge is one that several thousand school board members across California – and those who elect them – wrestle with, either consciously or unconsciously.

The California School Boards Association's training sessions and literature, which reach a substantial number of the school boards throughout the state, emphasize a democratic approach to governing schools. The Association's teachings are important because professional organizations and external networks have been shown to have a profound impact on information diffusion (Balla, 2001; Mintrom & Vergari, 1998). The CSBA's materials regularly state and teach that board members set the guiding vision for their district, which they should expect the superintendent and his or her administration to carry out. It is assumed that the constituents of board members inspire this vision. A primary way board members hold the superintendent accountable to the vision is by requesting data and asking questions at public meetings.

On the one hand, democratic theory is normatively alluring, as it speaks directly to the American adage of government by the people. On the other hand, democratic theory is difficult to live up to when the public has been shown to be mostly unengaged in school board politics, as shown by voter participation in school board elections. For example, in the 2014 statewide election, only thirty-one percent of registered voters cast a ballot in Los Angeles County. *The Los Angeles Times* called turnout in local elections, such as school board races, even more "anemic" (Blume, 2015).

A telling story run by the *Times* was about a contest masterminded by the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project, a non-profit organization with the mission of increasing participation of Latino voters. During the 2015 election, the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project announced a lottery as an incentive to cast a vote. They offered $25,000 to one lucky voter who voted in one of the heavily Latino Los Angeles Unified school board districts. The *Times* reported that the lottery initiative might have increased voter participation by about one percent (Blume, 2015).

Although school board voters may not paint a robust picture of democracy, most Californians' ballots do not lack for school board candidates. The Center for California Studies at California State University, Sacramento runs the California Elections Data Archive, which keeps pertinent election data. In the eighteen years that this data have been kept, candidates for school boards have comprised just less than half of all candidates for local offices. About three-quarters of school board elections are held in even years when voter turnout has been consistently higher (Boilard et al., 2012).

Expectations are bound to differ across and within communities on what is expected of school boards and the bureaucracies they control. Gruber (1987) wrote:

> Everyone, for example, wants a "responsive" school bureaucracy, but what they want may vary considerably. For parents it may mean administrators who consult them on curricular issues, for teachers it may mean a system that applies due process criteria to all personnel decisions, and for the mayor it may mean a superintendent who coordinates school policies with those of other city agencies. (p. 8)

Additionally, there are practical problems that arise through the school board/superintendent relationship (Howell, 2005). School board positions are primarily held by volunteers and busy professionals for whom educational expertise cannot be assumed. Superintendents are expected to have a depth of experience in education.

These realities would seem to tip the balance away from democratic influence. It is impossible to give one definitive answer on whether California school districts pervert democracy in the way that Zeigler and Jennings (1974) described or whether districts are democratically controlled in the way that Gruber (1987) showed is possible.

This is a question, however, that should be regularly considered when studying education governance decisions. Requiring school districts to engage their communities, as is the new normal in the LCFF era, seems likely to nudge districts farther down the spectrum of democracy, as community engagement is a mechanism for democratically controlling bureaucracies (Gruber 1987).

Civic and Community Engagement

Civic engagement, its inspiration, and its effects have been widely discussed by political theorists. Civic engagement is an easy synonym for what the LCFF terms "community engagement." Ehrlich (2000) gave the following definition:

> Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes. (p. vi)

The American Political Science Association (APSA) made a substantial commitment to the potential that engagement holds for strengthening democracy by creating a Standing Committee on Civic Education and Engagement in 2002. One result of this Committee was a book-length report led by Macedo (2005).

A dominant theme from Macedo and his colleagues was that political arrangements, such as policies and institutions, shape the "incentives, interests, identities, and capacities of citizens to participate effectively in civic life" (p. 4). This theme is a staple in the diet of political scientists, especially for March and Olsen. March and Olsen's work on institutions has spanned decades. In a book chapter geared specifically toward civic education they wrote, "Democratic institutions seek to provide the processes, resources, and abilities necessary to learn from experience and to match the changing political environment" (2000, p. 158). The LCFF provides an opportunity to further explore how, when, and why citizens engage in the governance of their schools.

The spirit of LCFF makes clear that school districts should aggressively engage their stakeholders in the planning and budgeting process, and they should take particular care to engage those who require greater educational resources – students from low-income families and their parents, English learners and their parents, and foster youth. In the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), districts must complete a document (based on a template from the State Board of Education), which is explicit that districts should involve stakeholders. The very first section of the template calls for "Meaningful engagement of parents, pupils, and other stakeholders" and offers guiding questions for how to do so. The template sends a clear political message that the quality and quantity of civic engagement as inspired by school districts should be impressive.

Community engagement as a way of enhancing democratic governance is normatively powerful. According to Macedo and his colleagues (2005), there are three broad themes for the merits of community engagement. First, civic engagement enhances the quality of democratic governance because when citizens have a say in governing, government priorities more closely mirror the needs of citizens. Second, participation in self-rule brings legitimacy to government. Third, civic engagement is part of the good life. As Marcedo and his colleagues wrote:

> We believe that civic engagement is valuable in itself, that popular self-rule involves the exercise of distinctive human capacities and is an intrinsically noble enterprise. We follow Alexis de Tocqueville, John Stuart Mill, and many others in holding that participation has the potential to educate and invigorate citizens to expand their understanding and capacities. (p. 4)

To varying degrees, these reasons explain why community engagement was a guiding part of the LCFF; however, my informants most often cited more practical reasons, rather than normative, for the need for community engagement. They pointed most often to the consistent research findings on the positive effect of parent involvement in their children's schools (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Noguera, 2001).

When shaping the LCFF, some interest groups were wary about community engagement being a strong enough spur for districts to responsibly spend the money on the students for whom it was intended. While community engagement is theoretically appealing it can be practically troublesome. Based on the relevant research literature, the main pitfalls for the LCFF and its commitment to community engagement are:

1. Institutions favor some citizens over others (Bartels 2008; Gilens 2012);
2. Not all citizens want to engage (Finders & Lewis, 1994; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002; Mutz 2006);
3. Not all citizens know how to engage and some are better organized and louder than others (Carpini & Keeter, 1997; Fiorina 1999);
4. Not all elected officials or district administrators know how to engage and some are better at it than others (Conley & Cooper, 2010);
5. It should not be assumed that everyone understands the LCFF in the same way (McLaughlin, 1990; Spillane et al. 2002).

Verba, Schlozman, and Brady's (1995) Civic Volunteerism Model provides a helpful framework for organizing these potential pitfalls of community engagement. The Civic Volunteerism Model rests on three factors: resources, psychological engagement with

politics, and access to networks through which individuals can be recruited to political life (p. 267). In short, community engagement in California school districts will depend upon: *Who is able? Who is willing? Who is asked?*

Who is Able. Common sense states that when a district removes barriers to participating, it results in achieving greater engagement. A few well-known, best practices are providing translators and translated materials, making free childcare available, accommodating parent work schedules, and offering transportation. While extremely important, creating access to district political processes by removing barriers does not go far enough to ensure that all citizens are able to participate. Districts must also assume some responsibility for ensuring that all citizens have access to, and are able to understand, key information.

It has been well demonstrated that political institutions have been designed to favor some citizens more than others (see Bartels, 2008; Gilens 2012). Logically, if the same spirit of self-interested policy influence that has been applied to financial regulations is applied to the governance of school districts, then just as wealthy citizens enjoy what many would consider an advantageous tax code, the children of the affluent and well connected would enjoy better schools. Unequal educational opportunities are in fact an undisputable reality in the United States (Coleman et al., 1966; Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Duncan & Murnane, 2011). It is likely no coincidence that the citizens favored by political institutions and policies are the ones with the political know-how (Dee, 2004; Campbell, 2006).

Perhaps often overlooked, given our American mantra of "one person, one vote," is that citizens come to the arena, in this case school districts, with different levels of political skill. I do not disagree with Dahl's (1989) "strong principle of equality," which states that all people are equally qualified to serve in the governing process. However, as evidenced by the consistent race-based disparity in achievement on the *National Assessment of Educational Progress (*NAEP) Civics Assessment, some students are receiving better training on becoming future citizens than are others (Neimi & Junn, 1998; Keller, 2010). Districts must not assume that all citizens come to the table with equal political ability and if being faithful to the democratic ideal, this should not be a disqualifier from participation.

Because the local context is particularly critical to the implementation of the LCFF it is important to note that the local context of where children grow up helps socialize them to be different types of citizens. When looking at not just characteristics of the individual, but also the local context around political socialization, Gimpel, Lay, and Schuknecht (2003) found powerful socializing experiences were shared among subgroups of adolescents, such as African Americans, females, and children of immigrants. The authors posited that there is such a thing as "good" and "bad" socialization. The good kind of socialization supports the democratic process by fostering participation and opinion holding, whereas, bad socialization undermines these goals. Based on these findings, LCFF facilitators must be conscious of community dynamics and create spaces that foster key democratic actions, such as participation and opinion holding.

Who is Willing. School districts can do some things to entice engagement, such as providing free meals at meetings, but the fact is that some people enjoy civically engaging and some do not (Finders & Lewis, 1994; Mutz, 2006). Just as not everyone enjoys watching baseball, not everyone is eager to attend a school board meeting or talk school politics. A great many American citizens are content to forgo exposure to cross-cutting opinions in order to maintain harmony (Mutz, 2006) and prefer that governing take place out of sight (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002).

A finding of Theiss-Morse and Hibbing (2005) that rings true for LCFF engagement is that "Good citizens need to learn that democracy is messy, inefficient, and conflict-ridden" (p. 227). Indeed, most American citizens prefer harmony over conflict and this is a main reason why Americans avoid politics (Mutz, 2006). American citizens' aversion to conflict is a barrier that school districts will need to overcome. Creating the conditions that will lead to robust engagement – and perhaps thoughtful deliberation – will be a difficult challenge. When well facilitated, the deliberative process can make the messiness, inefficiency and conflict of democracy less uncomfortable, and provide the changes needed to benefit the common good.

By some measures, American political participation makes a sad picture. As Macedo and his colleagues wrote, "Citizens participate in public affairs less frequently, with less knowledge and enthusiasm, in fewer venues, and less equally than is healthy for a vibrant democratic polity" (p. 1). Most attention is paid to participation in national elections where it has been shown that many citizens do not see the benefits of participating as outweighing the costs (Rosenstone & Hansen, 2003).

However, a growing body of scholarship is finding that citizens are increasingly participating in unconventional ways compared to past political participatory contributions and their involvement tends to be oriented away from institutions (Bimber, 2003; Dalton, 2008;). Schudson (2000) wrote, “Citizenship in the United States has not disappeared. It has not even declined. It has, inevitably, changed” (p. 294).

It is important to note that not all scholars see more venues for engagement as a positive development. Fiorina (1999) argued the notion that “the more civic engagement the better” is invalid. He drew on political science’s cannon of knowledge of elite polarization and the proliferation of interest groups at the national level to hypothesize that 1) with more chances to participate than ever before, political institutions have become overwhelmed and unable to effectively respond; 2) governing can be messy and this messiness is often unappealing to citizens (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002) ; and 3) elite politicians have become polarized on the extremes (Binder, 2003; Poole & Rosenthal, 2007).

Especially relevant to this dissertation and its orientation towards civic engagement at the local level is a quick case study Fiorina (1999) conducted of a land-use issue in his hometown of historic Concord, Massachusetts. The issue involved an expansion plan of a prestigious prep school, as well as some charitable giving of land to the prep school, it was a plan that Fiorina found reasonable, and felt that a wide majority of Concord citizens thought sensible too. However, the implementation of the expansion unfolded in a way that few would find practical.

According to Fiorina, “A few ‘true-believers’ were able to hijack the democratic process and impose unreasonable costs – fiscal and psychological – on other actors as well as the larger community” (p. 402). There is potential for this also to occur in the governing meetings of school districts. To parallel Fiorina’s scenario more engagement opportunities across school districts may not lead to increased community involvement, but more opportunities for those who are already involved to continue to labor for their own preferences.

Academia has also spurred some creative initiatives to create more access points to the political arena and systems that are more representative and help citizens be more thoughtful about their decisions. As Theiss-Morse and Hibbing (2005) wrote:

> Scholars and observers have devised inventive ways for people to become involved, including citizen juries, policy forums (Dahl, 1970), coffee klatches (Mathews 1994), electronic town hall meetings (Etzioni, 1972), deliberative opinion polls (Fishkin, 1995), people’s courts, issue caucuses, grassroots opinion columns in newspapers, ‘confessional talk shows’ (Eliasoph 1998, p. 260), telepolls, national issue referenda (Cronin 1989), full-fledged teledemocracy (Becker & Slaton, 2000), neighborhood assemblies of 5000 people meeting weekly, and a civic videotext service (Barber, 1998).

The LCFF can be added to the list for innovative approaches to engage citizens.

Significant to the context of this study is that schools play a central role in the communities they serve. That schools have a direct relevance to the lives of many citizens, such as parents, would seem to make it more likely that they would be willing to engage.

While a meeting of the local water district is unlikely to draw much interest from the average citizen unless there is a crisis, such as a drought, most parents entrust the public school system with their children for a substantial part of the day, and therefore have an undeniable interest in the effectiveness of their children's schools.

Furthermore, there is increasing recognition from non-parents that what happens in schools has a rippling effect. For example, Mission:Readiness is a non-profit group of retired military officers who recognize the need for high-quality education as a military necessity. They state in their mission statement, "Currently, more than 70 percent of 17- to 24-year olds in the U.S. cannot serve in the military, primarily because they are too poorly educated, too overweight, or have a serious criminal record. Investing early in the upcoming generation is critical to securing our nation's future" (Mission:Readiness, 2014). Citizens may be more willing to engage with their local school districts out of parental duty and also because schools are a cornerstone of society. The chances of affecting education politics as bounded by the LCFF also seem reasonable.

Although voter turnout in school board elections has been low across California, in design the LCFF makes the possibility of providing more access points than just elections and also gives interested citizens more hope of making an impact. Alternatively, the willing may more resemble the "true-believers" who hijacked the democratic process in order to serve their own interests, such as Fiorina (1999) observed in Concord. As political scientists have posited, this outcome may well depend on who is asked (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Rosenstone & Hansen, 2003).

Who is Asked. The LCFF rules dictate that unlike political elections, it is not just the citizen's responsibility to show up, but that the district shares some responsibility in creating reasonable access to decision making processes for the community. Especially, in large districts that are home to varied interests, it is a given that organized groups will work to bring like-minded citizens to the table.

Although the rule changes created by the LCFF are significant, it does not make robust civic engagement a given, as it is no easy task. In their observation of school district politics McDonnell and Weatherford (2000) observed, "Broad-based political participation is low to nonexistent. Instead, active involvement is often limited to those with a direct stake in the schools, while sharp divisions persist along ethnic, union-management, and partisan ideological lines" (p. 186). As public engagement is the main accountability mechanism of the new law, school administrators and locally-elected officials must make a robust effort to reach out to their constituents or risk losing legitimacy and likely be sued by groups who want to have a say.

The ask for engagement that many school districts have done in the early LCFF implementation phases has been tremendous, especially compared with efforts prior to the LCFF (Humphrey & Koppich, 2014; Hahnel, 2015). Before the LCFF most districts asked for engagement in few ways outside of regular school board and site council meetings. The result was likely that the community members who were able and willing typically showed up. The LCFF encourages – and in some cases mandates – a whole new kind of ask – an ask that orients school districts toward new institutional rules and processes.

Beyond Being Asked. Asking for community input and inviting community input are two different things. There are specific actions schools take to either make parents feel welcome and a part of the education governance process, disinvited and completely detached from their children's education, or somewhere in between.

In a book written for practitioners, Mapp and her colleagues (2007) offered a rubric for administrators to consider the climate they are creating for parent and community partnerships. Their gold standard is what they term "partnership schools" (p. 15). Here, actions are taken by the school officials to promote building relationships, linking partnership activities to learning, addressing differences, i.e., making translators readily available and using culturally relevant textbooks, supporting parent advocacy, and sharing power.

On the opposite side of the spectrum are "fortress schools." In Fortress schools the school staff see engaging with families as a bother. Furthermore, teachers are not encouraged to see the point of helping parents understand learning objectives, and only the "cooperative parents" are invited to give input into governing decisions (p. 18).

Mapp and her colleagues suggested some guiding questions for how school administrators approach their thinking on how they and their staff engage families and the community. They are, "Does your school cling to attitudes and practices that confine parents to limited, traditional roles? Has your school tried to define what it means by parent involvement and partnership with families? How is your school connecting with community resources?" (p. 14).

While districts, especially large ones, are not as close to parents as their child's individual school, Mapp and colleagues' framework for engagement is applicable to how districts engage parents and the community.

Conclusion

The LCFF may be a policy tool aiming to promote equity and local control, but it can also be used as a lens to assess the democratic purity of the governance of local school districts. Whereas Zeigler and Jennings (1974) posited that the democratic arrow flows in reverse with the superintendent and board of education selling ideas to the citizenry, Gruber (1987) showed that with the right mechanisms, bureaucracy can be democratically controlled. The LCFF may provide such a mechanism with its new mandate for community engagement. The extent of this democratic control will depend upon who is willing, able, and asked to participate and the conditions in which participation occurs.

Chapter Three: The Local Control and Accountability Plan

This chapter reviews and explores the conceptual framework behind the LCAP as I understand it from a few dozen interviews with policymakers and advocates, attending private strategy meetings among interest groups, being present at public forums, and reviewing the small, but growing body of reports analyzing the practical use of the tool. Throughout the chapter I consider the paradox of shifting to local control while still maintaining accountability through state oversight.

Given the importance of the LCAP, it has attracted widespread attention from both interest groups and think tanks. Several studies after the first year of implementation narrowly focused on a single issue or a few issues that were central to the mission of the interest group publishing the study. For example, Brian Lee (2015), of Fight Crime Invest in Kids, read and analyzed the LCAPs of the 50 largest districts in the state on the strategies districts used to deter suspensions, expulsions, and chronic absenteeism.

Laura Faer and Marjorie Cohen (2015), of Public Council, published a report that focused specifically on the school climate and attendance strategies to support foster youth that were reported in LCAPs. Among the most comprehensive studies of how the LCAP is being implemented comes from a team of researchers led by Humphrey and

Koppich (2014, 2015).[15] The Humphrey and Koppich teams looked at how districts across the state were implementing the new law, as well as considered feedback from districts on how they perceived the implementation to be going. Such studies have informed my work, and most often they have reinforced my own findings.

The LCAP's Conceptual Framework

American democracy works in part because public institutions are required to be transparent and to allow citizens the opportunity to engage information and policymakers when and if needed (Dahl, 1971). This is a key purpose of the LCAP: for districts to clearly present to stakeholders a comprehensive plan for how they intend to serve their high-needs students and then tie these plans to a budget. Districts must review the ways in which they engaged their communities in the planning and budgeting processes and state the effect that it had on the document. The LCAP is also an attempt by the state to keep tabs on districts as the legislature simultaneously gives more autonomy to local level decision making.

Although the complexity of the template was frustrating for districts and stakeholders alike, the LCAP concept has promise for inspiring more robust community

[15] Humphrey and Koppich are two longtime observers of California education politics. In partnership with Policy Analysis for California Education, a scholarly think tank based at Stanford University, they published a report after the first year of implementation and another after the second year of implementation. In the first-year report, *Toward a Grand Vision: Early Implementation of California's Local Control Funding Formula* (Humphrey & Koppich, 2014), their findings were based on a series of interviews with key policymakers and staff in Sacramento, as well as documentary analysis of key documents and more than 40 district LCAPs. Their research questions are complementary to this dissertation and spanned districts' initial views of the LCFF and districts' efforts to engage parents, community members, and educators.

involvement in district governance by bringing the public closer to the planning and budgeting process and providing transparency about the actions the district commits to taking. The LCAP presents an example of how some districts are operating in a Dahlesque world, where citizen preferences are conveyed to districts, and district plans and actions are translated to citizens through interest groups (Dahl, 1971).

In conducting interviews with twenty-three Sacramento insiders who were heavily involved in shaping the LCFF, common themes emerged on how the LCAP took form. These themes were both academic and practical and can be explored in a framework borrowed by Cohen and Moffitt (2009), when they were investigating the impact and politics of Title I.

Cohen and Moffitt conducted an historical analysis of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) from its inception in 1965 to the time of their publication in 2009 and found that that policy instruments can be boiled down to accountability, incentives, and funding. These instruments are likely to determine the success of policy implementation.

The ability to actually solve a problem targeted by a policy is mainly dependent on the instruments provided by the policy. Both the ambition of the policy aims and the adequacy of the instruments are likely to determine if the policy will be a success, and therefore likely to be politically reinforced. On the other hand, if a policy is more ambitious than the provided instruments, it is likely to be a failure, and therefore expected to be politically undermined.

Building on past policy implementation research, Cohen and Moffitt analyzed Title I through a dichotomy of policy versus practice. Policy sets the rules of the game and practice entails working within these rules. Cohen and Moffitt observed a dilemma of policymakers defining problems and designing remedies to be enacted by the people who are suffering the problems. The very nature of suffering problems such as poverty or lack of educational opportunity provides a poor vantage point from which to seize a remedy. Without carefully designed help, Cohen and Moffitt posited that those suffering problems often lack the capability to solve it.

In the context of Tile I, pinpointing those who are suffering the problem is multifaceted. Students who were living in poverty were no doubt the main target of federal help, but so were the schools that were serving them. The schools had limited resources to improve learning opportunities and lacked technical and professional expertise to get the job done. The theory of Title I was to improve learning conditions for students by improving them by providing schools with more resources.

Orienting Cohen and Moffitt's dilemma towards the LCFF, it is children in traditionally marginalized communities who are suffering the problem of low educational achievement. A key LCFF remedy for improving achievement is to better incorporate the preferences of marginalized communities into schooling resources and practices and align their input with educational opportunities.

According to my interviewees, all arrows point to the loudly-voiced fear of the civil rights groups that the funding intended for the student groups identified for extra funding would, in practice, not go to these students if districts were left unmonitored as the central

need to develop a tool like the LCAP that would check districts use of funds. Respondents also explained the LCAP as a tool to increase public access to the governing process and also to tightly couple the planning process with budgeting. These themes match Cohen and Moffitt's conceptual framework of creating instruments for accountability, incentives, and funding as salient policy instruments. The LCAP combines the three concepts in important ways:

1. The LCAP provides accountability by requiring school boards to formally approve the document and display it on the district webpage. If the public feels that the district is not executing what is promised in an LCAP, advocacy groups might challenge a district in court or citizens might challenge the sitting school board for re-election.
2. The LCAP provides the incentive for districts to actively engage its communities in the production of the document to avoid being sued by civil rights groups and the hassle of a legal battle; or for board members to keep their seats in the next election. Furthermore, although the state does not approve the plans of local districts – county superintendents do – the public nature of the LCAP allows state actors to examine the budget and planning priorities of districts, which could lead for calls to roll back autonomy if policymakers are displeased by what they see.
3. LCFF seized the opportunity of rising state revenue to redistribute funding to districts; and the LCFF married the planning and budgeting process.

Accountability and Incentives in the LCAP

Using accountability and incentives as policy instruments are often complementary and therefore best discussed together.

When I spoke with State Board of Education President Michael Kirst,[16] he brought up the concept of police patrols and fire alarms that was originally introduced by political scientists McCubbins and Schwartz (1984) to explain different ways that Congress could hold public agencies accountable. He also shared with me an article in *Teacher's College Record* authored by Henig (2012) that showed how the essence of this theory, while in some ways different, can also be relevant for school boards.

The way in which the LCAP served as an accountability mechanism was by sharing data. Two options for the practical use of data led McCubbins and Schwartz (1984) to coin the term "police patrol" and "fire alarm" and for Henig (2012), and Kirst and his State Board of Education team to operationalize the concepts.

When orienting McCubbins and Schwartz's theory towards education politics, Henig described police patrol as the following:

> Police patrol oversight is centralized and activated by the policy-making body. Just as a police car might cruise a precinct looking for suspicious activity, a district might mandate analysis of student-level gains by schools or teachers, conduct school visits to gather more qualitative data, or contract with independent researchers to evaluate program implementation. Like police patrols, these uses of data might help detect and remedy violations of expected behavior and simultaneously serve

[16] All informants in this study were assured confidentiality; however, Michael Kirst gave permission to be named.

> as a deterrent to teachers and schools that might otherwise substitute their own goals and referred behaviors for those pronounced from above. Most of the discussion about the role of educational data for standards-based accountability has been framed in this top-down, managerial police patrol formulation. (p. 19).

When describing the concept of fire alarm oversight, Henig states:

> Fire alarm oversight, on the other hand, involves establishing rules and procedures that empower individual citizens and organized interest groups to more easily and effectively spot poor or misdirected bureaucratic performance (see smoke) and bring this to the attention of higher authorities (ring the alarm) when they do. It reconfigures the data regime to broaden the range of groups and the types of data involved. NCLB, by mandating the public release of test score data and requiring that districts inform parents when their schools are failing to make AYP,[17] has elements of the fire alarm approach. Data in this way are designed to trigger politics – to activate the mobilization of groups whose street-level perspective might otherwise be excluded – rather than as a depoliticized source of guidance aimed primarily at elites. (p. 19)

The fire alarm approach suggests that making data more broadly available could stimulate a healthier policy-making process by working *through* politics rather than *around* it. The LCFF and the LCAP aimed at shifting education governance away from the top-down

[17] AYP was a term unique to the No Child Left Behind legislation as an abbreviation for the "Adequate Yearly Progress" that schools were required to meet based on their students' scores on standardized tests.

managerial structure embodied by the categorical system of funding to a system that encourages local politics: from police patrol to a fire alarm.

McCubbins and Schwartz's (1984) model is not a perfect match, as they designed it for Congressional oversight, whereas the LCFF deals with school districts, county offices of education, and the state, but the essence of the model is a good fit. McCubbins and Schwartz argued that a fire alarm is likely to be more effective for two reasons. First, laws are often vaguely written and possible violations identified by citizen groups bring the opportunity to clarify the law's intent. Second, fire alarms are more likely to catch violations where police patrols would miss them because the fire alarm approach empowers citizens to be active beyond where bureaucracies have the capacity to monitor. The paradigm shift of local control called for by the LCFF divests power from the state legislature, but in doing so gives Sacramento better data on which it can act in the future.

Related to the shift from police patrols to fire alarms, my informants reported that the LCFF and LCAP were also meant to change the culture of education governance and the way in which the state interacts with local districts. The federal No Child Left Behind Act is one of the most salient examples of what education scholars consider the accountability era in education governance (McGuinn, 2006). Although the No Child Left Behind Act had elements of the fire alarm model, as Henig noted, the police patrol model was dominant in the law. With the No Child Left Behind Act, policymakers set targets for student test scores and if they were not met, schools faced disciplinary action, such as being closed down or taken over by the state.

Looking retrospectively at California during this period, the state did not actually close down any schools, although such action might have been justified. However, the state did threaten schools with this power and districts took this saber rattling seriously by either preemptively restructuring low-performing schools or turning them over to charter management organizations. Theoretically, the incentive to meet the state's target was to retain local control and avoid what was viewed as punishment for poor performance.

When the LCFF was being considered in 2013, a common perception of my informants was that because the system focused on mostly negative consequences, districts were less willing to share data and to ask for help from Sacramento. A longtime staffer at the State Capitol stated, "We wanted to try to change the nature of the conversation about school accountability from rewards and sanctions and market mechanisms to supporting capacity building and investing in human capital."

Although opaque, shifting the politics to the local level by requiring that the community be engaged could be viewed as an incentive for local districts. After all, according to Alexis de Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill, civic engagement is part of the good life.

Some education policy scholars have decried the past good intentions of the Progressive Movement to isolate schools from politics (Stone, 2001; Cohen & Moffitt, 2009; Henig 2012). This motivation came from an idealized notion that schools could be governed according to evidence-based policy that would be untainted by politics. Henig (2012) advised, "Instead of designing institutions and processes to block politics, design them to use politics as its own check and balance, as its own restraint" (p. 17). Architects of

the LCFF acknowledged that empowering local districts to make their own decisions and leverage local politics to understand the needs and wishes of their communities was in fact their purpose. In other words, they wanted to shift away from the police patrol and towards the fire alarm.

The first section of the LCAP template approved by the State Board of Education sets out the guidelines for "Stakeholder Engagement." The template directed districts to lay out the process they used to consult with stakeholders and create a narrative about how this consultation contributed to the development of their LCAP. The template suggested guiding questions along the lines of how have stakeholders been identified, engaged, and included in the development of the LCAP. The next sections of the LCAP relate to goal setting, action planning, and budgeting.

Once a school board approves the LCAP, districts are required to submit their plan to the county superintendent for approval. It was widely understood by my informants that counties should tread softly on district plans in the early phase of implementation. To a certain extent, this may not have been completely at their discretion, but because of a lack of resources. Counties reported having inadequate capacity for supporting and reviewing their districts' LCAPs (Humphrey & Koppich, 2014). In turn, counties are required to submit a countywide plan to the state for approval.

The LCFF lands the ultimate accountability mechanism at the most basic form of democracy – elections. The LCAP gives hard evidence of how the district is hearing its community. If the board were to pass a plan that was counter to, or misrepresented the community's priorities, this could be a tool for political opponents to show that a boards

were not accurately representing their constituents when members stands for reelection. As an informant stated, “If you don’t like what they do, you go fire their ass at the next election. Hire somebody else in the next ballot box.” Therefore, not only are districts required by the LCFF and LCAP to undertake robust engagement efforts, but school boards are also incentivized to keep their jobs.

Policymakers voiced both publicly and privately that they had no desire to be punitive in the LCFF era, but only supportive of districts’ capacity building needs. Such statements were met with occasional skepticism by some administrators I spoke with at the local level and with scorn by some in the civil rights community. District administrators did not know if they could trust state promises not to embarrass districts by intervening because of poor performance; and civil rights leaders reasoned that students would be ill served if districts did not face clear consequences if goals were not met. Regardless of the intentions of policymakers when the LCAP was enacted, requiring districts to be transparent about their planning and budgeting could spark a reason for lawmakers to reconsider the long desired autonomy granted by the LCFF and civil rights groups would no doubt turn to LCAPs to fan this fire.

A Marriage Between Budgeting and Planning

A policy aim of the State Board of Education was to tightly couple budgeting with planning. As one policymaker put it, one intent of the LCFF was to “shotgun-marry the curriculum and educational leadership divisions with the budget.” The intent was to pair planning and budgeting, which several informants indicated was not currently being

effectively practiced. A prominent legislative staffer stated that the purpose of the LCAP was to "self-consciously, and in some places for the first time, self-consciously link budgetary and spending decisions as well as resource allocation decisions, with their academic and systemic goals." Coupling budgeting and planning was both a way to make district governance more efficient and effective and transparent to the public.

My district-level informants reported increased collaboration across district departments than before the LCFF. Prior to the LCFF, many district departments were working in silos.[18] According to a prominent policymaker I spoke with, in a one-dimensional process, budget offices would inform the curriculum and instruction department how much they had to spend and they would develop their plans accordingly.

Post-LCFF, Humphrey and Koppich (2014) reported that most of the districts they studied shifted to joint program-fiscal teams to develop their budgets. The researchers captured one district official as saying, "The LCAP process really pushed the emphasis on collaboration. We recognized that people were working in silos. And we had to change" (p. 5). In her report for the Education Trust-West, Hahnel (2015) also observed this newfound cooperation. She stated, "Administrators responsible for instruction and budget are collaborating more than ever before in a real effort to align budgets with academic plans" (p. 4).

Not everyone agrees that the marriage is a good one. According to Arun Ramanathan (2015), a civil rights group leader and contributor to *Education Week*, "Authentic parent engagement, strategic planning, and financial accountability are difficult

[18] Humphrey and Koppich (2014) found similar sentiments during their research.

tasks all by themselves. Wedging them into a single plan ensures that none of them will be done very well." In addition, districts will feel scrutinized, fear negative consequences, and therefore exaggerate the excellence of their plans.

Conclusion: State Oversight and Local Control Working in Harmony

This section showed how the LCAP sought to utilize accountability, incentives, and funding as salient policy instruments. The LCAP coupled districts' goals with their budgeting process, which was not previously done in most districts. With the benefit of an improving economy, and therefore more funding for schools, the LCFF successfully redistributed how school funds are more equitably spent. The community engagement that was required to complete an LCAP served as both an accountability mechanism, as well as an incentive, by shifting from a police patrol system to more of a fire alarm arrangement.

It was the hope of policymakers who championed the LCFF in Sacramento that the fire alarm approach would empower communities to recognize poor performance and work at the local level to correct undesired or ineffective district programs. Many times during the enactment phase of the LCFF, Governor Brown cited subsidiarity as his guiding governing philosophy. Subsidiarity is an organizing principle from the Catholic tradition that matters should be handled at the level of the lowest competent authority.[19] When invoking subsidiarity, Brown is basically expressing his desire to shift policymaking responsibility from the state level to the local level. However, passing matters down the ladder does not

[19] Brown's faith in this principle likely comes from a combination of his experience as a big city mayor and a one-time Catholic priest in training.

absolve higher authorities from responsibility for the actions and results achieved by the agencies they are delegating to.

Working in the fire alarm model and embracing subsidiarity still leaves a role for state oversight. If a community "sees smoke" in their district and "rings the alarm," the State Board of Education or the legislature may choose to respond. So far, it is unclear what this response will be. One possibility is that the state will send supportive coaching to districts that are inadequately performing, as the State Board promised to do. Another option could be that the legislature uses the legislative process to take back some of the control it relinquished. Both scenarios are incentives for districts to satisfy their communities and improve performance.

Chapter Four: The Local Control Funding Formula Finds its Way Through a Policy Window and Gets Enacted

The Local Control Funding Formula represents a major shift in how California funds and governs schools. The new law is a culmination of decades of policy ideas and research that long floated around Sacramento, but never came fully to fruition. As students of policy well know, the policy process from the emergence of a problem to implementing policy can take a decade and more (Kirst & Jung 1982; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993).

My interviewees commonly commented on how different aspects of the LCFF, particularly the concept of a weighted student formula, had long been an interest of the education policy community. A weighted-student funding formula that gives more money to districts that serve high-needs students, such as those who are learning English or socio-economically disadvantaged, was seriously proposed by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's administration, but was not acted on by the Legislature.

The enormity of the achievement of enacting the LCFF and the politics that it took to get there tell an interesting story that can aptly be told using Kingdon's (1982) model for agenda setting. Kingdon's model, which he advanced in his book, *Agenda, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, is useful for three reasons. First it provides the opportunity to explain what the LCFF sets out to do; second the agenda setting model provides a roadmap for understanding the context behind the LCFF, such as how policy makers and influencers understood the problem at hand, viable policy solutions; and third it can handle doing both tasks simultaneously.

The Agenda Setting Model

Kingdon's (1982) agenda setting model provides the framework for understanding how the LCFF rode streams of problems, policy, and politics to open a policy window and arrive seriously on the governmental decision agenda. Successful creation of the political willpower to take corrective steps is found in policymakers' and practitioners' acknowledging that the finance system was clearly failing California's students, a unique context for education governance in California, and an advocacy coalition that found just enough to like in the State Board of Education and governor's proposal to get onboard.

Kingdon set out to "understand not only why the agenda is composed as it is at any one point in time, but how and why it changes from one time to another" (p. 3). His resulting theory has since become a classic. Building on March, Olsen, and Cohen's Garbage Can Model, Kingdon called the federal government an "organized anarchy" where on any given issue there are streams of problems, policy proposals, and politics that generally float around autonomously. However, when they converge and the policy window is open, an issue can land on the decision agenda where it will receive high odds of action.

Key to Kingdon's framework is making the distinction between agendas and alternatives. According to Kingdon, a set of problems can land on the agenda – often as a result of a policy champion, such as an elected official, or a social phenomenon, such as high gas prices. A problem landing on the agenda will trigger a series of alternatives for governmental action, which will narrow the options for decision makers.

Problems

According to Kingdon, “Fairly often, problems come to the attention of governmental decision makers not through some sort of political pressure or perceptual slight of hand but because some more or less systematic indicator simply shows that there is a problem out there” (p. 90).

Developing or constructing an indicator on which most can agree is an important challenge in the policy arena. Doing so allows decision makers to regularly assess the magnitude of the problem and who is being affected. These are key factors that determine the urgency in which they act or do not act.

Before the LCFF was enacted there were a number of indicators that were growing more powerful as they showed the status quo to be less and less defensible. In his 2013 State of the State Address, Governor Brown summed up how the problems with the state’s education system were commonly coming to be understood. He stated, “…Three million California school age children speak a language at home other than English and more than two million children live in poverty. And we have a funding system that is overly complex, bureaucratically driven and deeply inequitable.” Civil rights groups, such as The Education Trust-West, PICO, and the ACLU had been vocal about these disparities for some time.

Surveys have long shown Californians to be dissatisfied with the state of education across the state. In 2013 (the year that the LCFF was adopted), a survey by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) revealed that eighty-nine percent of those surveyed thought that the quality of education was at least somewhat of a problem. About half of the survey

respondents considered the quality of education to be a big problem (Baldassare, Bonner, Petek, & Shrestha, 2013).

Finances were a big part of why Californians were dissatisfied. In the same 2013 PPIC survey, sixty-three percent of respondents reported that the current level of state funding for their local schools was not enough. For California, the Great Recession that started at the end of 2007 marks a long and hard fall from what was the Golden Era of California education when Governor Pat Brown and policymakers invested heavily in educational institutions and infrastructure. California's diminished investment in education became increasingly evident as the Great Recession took away billions of dollars from schools in only a matter of years.

An analysis of the impact of the Great Recession on school budgets by the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities showed that California decreased spending on public K-12 schools by nearly fourteen percent between 2008 and 2014, which is among the top ten decreases in the country during the same timeframe (Leachman & Mai, 2014). Many school districts were forced to cut beloved programs such as athletics and the arts.

Inequity in the California education system also became a powerful indicator of failing public policy. Through the work of social justice advocates and accumulating academic research, a persistent achievement gap between youth from low-income and high-income families, as measured by standardized tests among other metrics, has been increasingly understood (Reich, 2006; Duncan & Murnane, 2011). Additional gaps are easily identifiable between African American and Hispanic youth and their White and Asian peers

(Jencks & Phillips, 1998). Funding goes a long way to explaining these gaps (Gándara & Rumberger, 2006; Reich, 2006; Reardon, 2011).

California's long approach of categorical funding was showing its flaws as the achievement gap remained constant and its rigidity tied the hands of local administrators when school districts might have benefited from flexibility in navigating a financial crisis. Prior to the LCFF, California schools were largely funded by two sources – unrestricted and restricted funds. The restricted funds are commonly referred to as categorical funding, which accounted for approximately thirty percent of the funding that school districts received in 2009-2010 (Weston, 2011). Districts received categorical funds for needed programs, such as transportation, textbooks, and summer school. In 2005-2006, there were more than sixty categorical programs that districts had to manage, although the Legislature relaxed approximately forty categoricals in 2009 when the state was reeling from the Great Recession (Weston, Sonstelie, & Rose, 2009).

A longtime education policy staffer offered me several explanations for the rise of categoricals. The first reason is that the categorical approach gave legislators a high-profile way to demonstrate that they were doing the jobs they were elected to do. The staffer avowed, "Remember, legislators come to office believing that their job is to create bills and create laws and when someone comes to me with a problem, I say I will fix your problem."

Secondly, categoricals were a way to protect against larger portions of school budgets being claimed by the powerful teacher unions. The staffer further noted, "The other thing that helped create those [categoricals] was teacher unions pushing for all the

money on the table. A way to prevent all the money to going into salaries, to stop school boards, from doing the wrong thing with the money."

The categorical funding system was also a response to the landmark California Supreme Court case *Serrano v. Priest* (1976), which essentially ruled that California's current education finance system of mainly relying on local property taxes to fund local schools was not adequately providing equal educational opportunities for all students (Picus, 1991; Timar & Shimaski, 1994). The Legislature attempted to remedy the situation by taking control and dictating how districts were to spend by establishing categorical funding buckets for such priorities as special education, transportation, regional occupational programs and many others. This strategy had the effect of shifting a significant level of politics away from local districts and directed it towards the state Legislature (Picus, 1991). State level education finances were made more complex when California voters approved Proposition 13 (1978) two years later, which decreased property taxes and therefore revenue for the state.

The categorical approach proved to be an ineffective response to the equity called for by *Serrano* (Timar & Shimanski, 1994). A significant reason for the categoricals' ineffectiveness is that they were overly prescriptive and underfunded (Picus, 1991; Timar & Shimanski, 1994; Murphy & Picus, 1996). Around 2012, policymakers in Sacramento, who traditionally crave setting mandates, were starting to be receptive to the long held complaint of local school districts that they needed more flexibility in their local budgeting and governing decisions. In a state as diverse as California; with over 1,000 school districts

that vary widely in size, demographics, and geography; a one-size-fits-all approach struck many as overly simplistic.

School board members, school administrators, and their associations in Sacramento were becoming increasingly vocal about the difficulties of governing within the categorical system. This is an important point in Kingdon's model, as feedback plays a key role in bringing decision makers' attention to a problem. In a presidential address to the American Educational Research Association in which she directed the concept of policy feedback towards education politics, McDonnell (2009) described the concept in the following way, "The theory of policy feedback posits that policies enacted and implemented at one point in time shape subsequent political dynamics so that politics is both an input into the policy process and an output." Policy feedback was an important part of the agenda setting equation for the LCFF.

Although the indicators of insufficient funds, inequity, and overly prescriptive mandates from Sacramento were generally accepted as defining the problem in the California education system, according to Kingdon the people in and around government sometimes need a little extra push. He observed, "That push is sometimes provided by a focusing event like a crisis or disaster that comes along to call attention to the problem, a powerful symbol that catches on, or the personal experience of a policy maker" (p. 95). Kingdon's examples of a problem being pushed to decision makers' attention generally come in the form of crisis. For the LCFF this push was something more of a celebration in the form of a recovering economy that looked to save schools from the brink of financial

disaster. I will go into greater detail about how this affected the debate in later sections of the chapter.

Governor Brown provided the focusing event by making a weighted student formula a personal priority. He was also the chief policy entrepreneur. Policy entrepreneurs have been shown to be an important catalyst for policy change. Mintrom and Vergari (1998) found that:

> In attempting to bring a policy innovation into good currency in their own states, policy entrepreneurs must plan how to sell their ideas to others. They aim first to convince others of the worth of the innovation as a solution to a political problem, and then to mobilize people to help secure approval of the policy. (130-131)

The LCFF was front and center in Governor Brown's 2013 State of the State Address. Among the most salient lines of the speech was, "Equal treatment for children in unequal situations is not justice." One of my informants who is close to Brown reported that the governor promised the Legislature, which was two-thirds Democrats and members of his own party, "the fight for their lives if they didn't approve this [the LCFF]."

Policy

Since Otto von Bismarck first said so, many a politician has recited his famous line, "Politics is the art of the possible." This phrase reminds that progress is not necessarily impeded by a lack of good ideas, but of selecting the right ideas for the moment. The bookshelves of Sacramento are full of well thought out policy proposals that are unlikely to ever be enacted. Kingdon brings a biological perspective to the plethora of policy choices:

> Generating alternatives and proposals in this community resembles a process of biological natural selection. Much as molecules floated around in what biologists call the 'primeval soup' before life came into being, so ideas float around in these communities…The 'soup' changes not only through the appearance of wholly new elements, but even more by the recombination of previously existing elements. While many ideas float around in this policy primeval soup, the ones that last, as in a natural selection system, meet some criteria. (pp. 116-117)

Kingdon's analogy of primeval soup to what happens in the policy world well explains much of where the LCFF came from.

A weighted student funding formula – a key principle on which the LCFF is based – has been floating in California's primeval soup caldron for a long time. Yet its adoption and implementation are groundbreaking for California. Educational equity has long been on the tongues of reformers everywhere. Some states have achieved equity better than others, but everywhere it has been a long hard fight across diverse venues from local school boards to state legislatures to the courts (Reed, 2003).

According to Kingdon, ideas float around policy communities, which are made up of issue area specialists who might work inside or outside of government. These specialists float ideas around the community by publishing official recommendations and reports or even as casually as conversing over lunch. For K-12 education, the policy community is as large as it is diverse. Kingdon notes that some communities can be either close knit or more diverse and fragmented. California education policy community has examples of both.

Cohesion within the education policy world is exemplified by the Getting Down to Facts Project which occurred from 2005-2007. Stanford University's Center for Education Policy Analysis, one of the host institutions, reported that the project convened scholars from thirty-two institutions from a variety of fields, such as education, economics, and political science. Extensive papers were prepared by the group that explored topics related to the current conditions of education in California, the effective use of resources, and the potential value of additional resources. The Getting Down to Facts Project was embraced by influential policy actors, such as the Governor's Committee on Education Excellence, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and legislative leaders. The collection of studies was mentioned by several of my informants as key to softening up the political environment to make policymakers more receptive to what eventually became the LCFF.

Also illustrative of a policy community that works closely together is a group that calls themselves the Education Coalition. This diverse group of stakeholders do not agree on all issues, and in fact sometimes vehemently disagree. However, the executive directors, or very senior leadership of the organizations, agree to get together once a month to keep each other appraised of their priorities. Education Coalition participants include the California Teachers Association (CTA), California School Board Association (CSBA), Association of California School Administrators (ACSA), Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Parent Teacher Association (PTA), California School Employees Association (CSEA), among others. Interviewees reported a great degree of honesty and trust among this group despite differing political priorities.

Sacramento's education stakeholders can loosely be organized into three groups: management, civil rights, and teachers. All groups undoubtedly agree that policy should be adjusted to better serve students, but often have differing philosophies on what this should look like.

Commonly referred to as the management groups are organizations that represent school management. Membership associations representing school boards (CSBA), administrators (ACSA), and financial officers – the California Association of School Business Officers (CASBO) – make up three of the most active and influential management groups in Sacramento. Accompanying these three are several large school districts that choose to afford a full-time lobbyist. Los Angeles Unified, San Diego Unified, Riverside Unified, and the lobbying firm, Capitol Advisors, which represents many school districts, are almost always invited to the management discussion table. These organizations tend to have an eye towards policy that does not impose state regulation on local districts.

The civil rights groups are commonly thought of as a loose coalition that looks out for the rights of children. These include The Education Trust-West, Californians for Justice, PICO, Public Advocates, and others. Their unifying mission is closing achievement gaps and they seize upon opportunities that show some students to be negatively impacted because of actions by schools to advocate for more regulation or a redistribution of resources.

The management organizations and civil rights groups sometimes find themselves at odds, not because they disagree on the necessity of closing achievement gaps, but because of their philosophies on governance. In most cases, the management groups prefer less regulation from the state while the civil rights groups view state regulation as an

efficient route to affecting all California's nearly 1,000 school districts and preventing bad actors.

The third group, and the one consistently considered the most politically influential, is the California Teachers Association. Although the CTA attends the Education Coalition group meeting, the organization is also an example of some fragmentation in the California education policy community. On the LCFF, the CTA was not a regular collaborator with the civil rights groups or the management groups. Some informants suggested that this was because its large political clout trumped the need to collaborate and others suggested it was because of its organizational culture. It is undisputed that the CTA wields powerful influence with the Legislature because of its massive campaign war chest. The ability to give political campaign contributions is a tool that the management and civil rights groups do not possess.

The local flexibility offered by the LCFF was a main attraction for CTA, as it put more money on the table for potential raises, which the old categorical system prevented. Although raises were not automatic and would be left to local decision makers, the influence of local teacher unions gave CTA enough confidence to get on board with the LCFF.

The level of cohesion versus fragmentation within the policy community has implications for policy decisions, as policy might come together in a cohesive way or if fragmented then, "The left hand knows not what the right hand is doing, with the result that the left hand sometimes does something that profoundly affects the right hand, without anyone ever seeing the implications" (Kingdon, 2011, p. 119). In the Sacramento K-

12 education policy community the Getting Down to Facts Project is evidence of close knit relationships. Acrimony that occurs through spending priorities between management groups and the California Teachers Association sometimes shows fragmentation.

Critical to bringing policy proposals beyond policy communities are policy advocates, which Kingdon terms policy entrepreneurs. It is the policy entrepreneur who is responsible for "softening up" the policy communities, "which tend to be inertia-bound and resistant to major changes, and larger publics, getting them used to new ideas and building acceptance for their proposals" (p. 128). In California, the concept of a weighted student formula had long been circulated. A recent time it was most prominently proposed was in 2007 by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's Commission on Education Excellence in its report, *Students First: Renewing Hope for California's Future*. In this model, the state allocates more resources, i.e., dollars, for students whom the research shows struggle the most. The data continually show that these students are, on average, children from low-income families, students of color (predominantly African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Native American), and foster youth (although a relatively small subset of the population).

The framework most credited for leading to the LCFF was a 2008 paper authored by Kirst, Bersin, a former U.S. attorney and superintendent of San Diego Unified School District, and Liu, who at the time was a law professor at the University of California, Berkeley, and is now on the state supreme court. One prominent legislative staffer stated in our interview, "I'm pretty sure that, that paper, I'm sure the conversations that Jerry [Governor Brown] and Mike [State Board of Education President Kirst] had over the course

of the campaign were the primary inspiration for it [the LCFF].” However, the final version of what became the LCFF in 2013 was not the first time it was proposed.

Governor Brown introduced a weighted pupil formula first in 2012 that fell flat with the Legislature. On the 2012 proposal, the legislative staffer affirmed to me, “The Legislature didn't pay a lot of attention to it honestly.” One reason for the lack of legislative attention is that the governor did not yet make education policy a top priority, but all the above are good examples of what Kingdon calls softening up. Kingdon wrote:

> To some degree, ideas float freely through the policy primeval soup. But their advocates do not allow the process to be completely free-floating. In addition to starting discussions of their proposals, they push their ideas in many different forums. These entrepreneurs attempt to ‘soften up’ both policy communities, which tend to be inertia-bound and resistant to major changes, and larger publics getting them used to new ideas and building acceptance for their proposals. (p. 128)

Although long talked about even before the 2007 report of Governor Schwarzenegger’s commission, the Bersin, Kirst, and Liu paper in 2008 and Governor Brown’s first official proposal of a weighted student formula in 2012 provided a great deal of softening up before the LCFF took off in 2013.

What finally turned into the LCFF was remarkable from the perspective of the chief architect, State Board President Kirst. In an interview with *EdSource*, Kirst stated his pleasure with the final bill by saying, “It is extremely rare in policy analysis that eighty

percent of what you recommend is put into law. Usually you hope policymakers will consider half or less" (as quoted in Fensterwald, 2013).

Politics

Kingdon's third ingredient in setting the policy agenda is the political stream. He wrote that the stream, "Is composed of such factors as swings of national mood, election results, changes of administration, changes of ideological or partisan distributions in Congress, and interest group pressure" (p. 162). All factors were present in California in order to bring the LCFF to fruition.

The 2010 election of Jerry Brown as governor of the Golden State was in many ways unique. He had been governor nearly forty years earlier. He started his first term as the youngest governor ever of California at age thirty-six; in 2010 he was starting his third term as the oldest ever governor of California at seventy-two. Brown's political career has been colorful. The nickname of "Moonbeam" that was given during his first stint as governor because of bold policy proposals, such as a state-run space exploration program, has stuck with him.

Since leaving the Governor's Office after his first two terms he has run for president three times, been mayor of Oakland, and served two terms as attorney general for California. My informants agreed that Governor Brown's life experiences since leaving the governor's office the first time, especially his terms as mayor of Oakland, gave him an affinity for fiscal restraint and subsidiarity. Subsidiarity is Governor Brown's often referred to governing philosophy that is based on the Jesuit tradition of delegating down to the

lowest competent authority. In the case of California education, subsidiarity means the transfer of power from the state to the 1,000 plus local school districts.

In style and philosophy, Brown is a stark contrast to his predecessor, movie star Arnold Schwarzenegger. A Republican, Schwarzenegger often found himself at odds with the Legislature, which was controlled by a large Democratic majority. Schwarzenegger also had the unenviable task of governing through the "Great Recession," when California schools were forced to accept large cuts in their budgets. When Brown came into office, the precarious nature of California's finances and seemingly dysfunctional State Capitol led political pundits to wonder if California was ungovernable.

Because of an improving economy and Brown's frugal leadership, California's fiscal outlook began to brighten, but school budgets had far from recovered to their pre-2007 levels. Brown refused to raise taxes to better fund schools without the approval of the voters. Consequently, in 2012 he was a main architect and champion of Proposition 30, which temporarily increased taxes on the wealthy, raised the sales tax, and prevented six billion dollars in cuts to the California education budget. When California voters passed Proposition 30, after several very lean years, schools were poised to enjoy a substantial increase in funding. This environment made possible the concept of seriously tweaking how schools are funded.

In the end, California voters approved Proposition 30 by a fifty-five to forty-five percent margin. Perhaps what is most remarkable is that some of the strongest approval came from those who were most impacted by the tax increase. An example is wealthy Marin County which voted sixty-nine to thirty-one percent in favor of raising taxes to fund

education at a higher level (California Secretary of State's Office). Other relatively affluent counties such as Napa, Santa Barbara, and San Francisco followed suit. The uniqueness of this situation was not lost on Governor Brown, who said, "I think this is the only place in America where a state actually said, 'Let's raise our taxes for our kids, for our schools, for our California Dream'" (as quoted in Finnegan, 2012). It is also notable that Brown recognized the significance of California voters sacrificing the individual for the collective good. Powerful arguments on the civic and economic benefits of a well-educated youth also almost certainly factored into many voters' decisions.

According to Kingdon, "People in and around government sense a national mood" (p. 146). The legitimacy of democratic governance mandates that the policy agenda not sway too far from the national mood. The landslide victory for Proposition 30 indicated that the California mood was receptive to an education policy agenda that was supportive of allocating more funds for the state's marginalized students. The extent to how much would be given to which students was a point of negotiation when Governor Brown's commitment to a new direction for education policy became clear to the Legislature and political posturing began.

The original LCFF proposal committed to a larger differentiation of funding for the targeted students, but school districts without large populations of children from low-income families, English learners, and foster youth, i.e., affluent districts, thought themselves on the losing end of this bargain and strongly pushed back against the governor's formula. The governor surrendered some ground, but kept the principle of equity intact.

There was also debate about who should benefit from the equitable spending. Members of the African American community were among the loudest critics of which students were left out of the students targeted for additional funding. On average, African American students have been victims of gaps in academic achievement and opportunity (Jencks & Phillips, 1998), yet they were not called out in the LCFF. Native Americans were another population that was left out. It is true that California school districts serve a significant number of African American and Native American students who would qualify for LCFF funding because they come from low-income families, but this was not enough for their advocates. This debate is unlikely to go away as the governor and State Board of Education maintain their commitment to the LCFF concept and will feed into the policy feedback loop.

Although some critics claim that the equitable funding commitment of the LCFF does not go far enough – and probably rightly so – it is a significant mark of progress for California. One major hurdle of equitable funding is not that citizens deny its importance, but with finite resources the financially better-off Californians have been remiss to divert funding from their children's education for the sake of students with a lesser political voice. Jennifer Hochschild and Nathan Scovronick (2000; 2004) showed a tension among education's purpose for individuals, specific groups, and the collective good. Although the collective good is appealing, advocates are often unwilling to sacrifice the interests of individuals and the groups they represent for the collective.

Key to a tenable political environment for overhauling the state's education funding and governance systems was the agreeability of the interest group community, which in

the case of California education is mostly the same as the policy community described earlier: the management groups, civil rights groups, and the California Teachers Association. Kingdon stated, “If important people look around and find that all of the interest groups and other organized interests point them in the same direction, the entire environment provides them with a powerful impetus to move in that direction” (p. 150). Fed up with the rigidity of the categorical system, the management groups felt that they could better serve students with the new flexibility that the LCFF offered. The civil rights groups were finally getting the weighted student funding that they had long been demanding, and the California Teachers Association saw opportunity to leverage both new flexibility and more funds for higher salaries.

Although the management groups, civil rights groups, and teachers have differing philosophies about how to attain it, education excellence is a core belief of all three and united them in their advocacy for the LCFF. As stated earlier, the LCFF fit each of the three general groups’ belief systems into its structure, as well as provided attractive enough financial incentives, to bring them onboard. There was a lot in the deal for all groups to like, yet serious concerns from the civil rights groups about the new local flexibility should not be understated.

Several of my informants reported that the civil rights groups’ uneasiness was due to the practical challenges of holding 1,000 school districts accountable instead of focusing the bulk of their resources at the state level. Yet, all interviewees from the civil rights wing acknowledged the difficulties of working within the categorical system and the governor’s resolve in reform.

Dragging their feet, albeit mostly politely, did reap rewards for the civil rights groups in a concession they received from the governor to assuage their fears about how districts would act given their newfound flexibility. In response to the nervousness of the civil rights groups it was agreed that procedures would be put in place to ensure transparency and robust engagement from the community about what district priorities should be. It was the demand for transparency and engagement that led to the Local Control and Accountability Plan. The design of the LCAP was delegated to the State Board of Education along with some other needed rulemaking.

The civil rights groups figured the best strategy was to accept the Governor's plan, which had the long sought weighted student formula as a cornerstone, and to blunt local control during the rulemaking stage. Skipping ahead for a moment: The civil rights groups were largely satisfied with the rulemaking stage of enactment, although they are continually pressing for tweaks. Speaking to a reporter after the LCAP was adopted by the State Board at its January 2014 meeting, John Affeldt, managing attorney of Public Advocates and a leader of the civil rights wing, stated, "I didn't think we would get this far. There has been significant movement and we must get on board together to give it a go" (As quoted in Fensterwald, 2014).

In addition to hope of making changes later, fear of getting left behind is accurate for describing what kept the Education Coalition together. Kingdon stated, "Joining the coalition occurs not because one has simply been persuaded of the virtue of that course of action, but because one fears that failure to join would result in exclusion from the benefits of participation" (pp. 159-160). The civil rights groups figured they had more to gain by

staying at the table and finding compromise rather than shift their full weight to opposition and risk being politically steamrolled.

The LCAP concept in turn produced some nervousness from the management groups, who feared it was a step back to the accountability era of education politics. The philosophy behind the accountability era was that data should be readily available on student performance and districts should be reprimanded for poor results, such as was described by the police patrol model in the last chapter. Districts complained that such a system was unfair because the data that was collected, i.e., student test results, did not give a full picture on how well districts were performing.

When it came to the LCAP, it was made clear that it would be written in a way so as to provide multiple indicators for judging a district's performance. The State Board of Education staff was simultaneously signaling that it had no intent to return to the harshness of the accountability era. Instead, the members had plans for creating support systems to help struggling districts in a constructive, not punitive way. Management groups were skeptical if such support systems were possible, but like the civil rights groups, they went along in part because they hoped to affect the conception of the LCAP during the rulemaking stage and did not want to get left behind in the deal making.

As were the civil rights groups, the management groups were also satisfied with the rulemaking of the State Board of Education. At the January 2014 meeting when the regulations were adopted, longtime California education reporter, John Fensterwald (2014), reported that "Both sides acknowledged the final version was clearer and surprisingly close to consensus." My informants reported that this surprising consensus

was because of the skillful facilitation and outreach of State Board of Education staff, as well as open lines of communication between the different stakeholder groups. Although both civil rights groups and management groups were relatively content with the State Board's rulemaking, the January 2014 meeting was not without fanfare.

An unprecedented 326 people signed up for public comment even though no one doubted the outcome of the State Board's decision to approve the new rules. One reason for the large turnout is that the stakeholder groups wanted to flex their muscles to remind the State Board, Legislature, and each other that they could mobilize their supporters should the new law not work in their favor as planned. Another reason for the large turnout was at the private request of State Board of Education staff who thought that positive testimony for the new rules would give helpful political cover to the Board to fight off the status quo. According to Fensterwald (2014), "After listening to seven hours of one-minute testimonies that were impassioned, instructive and inevitably repetitious, the State Board of Education, after little debate, unanimously approved the temporary regulations."

In addition to interest group support for enactment and Governor Brown serving as a principal policy entrepreneur, several nuances of California politics and institutions paved the way for the LCFF. California was among the first to experiment with term limits on state legislators. In 1990, California voters approved Proposition 140, which limited the terms legislators could serve to three, two-year terms in the lower house and two, four-year terms in the upper house. Constitutional officers, i.e., the governor, lieutenant governor,

secretary of state, etc. were limited to two four-year terms.[20] Elected officials who served prior to 1990 were not affected by the new law, which perhaps ironically, kept the door open for Jerry Brown to return to the Governor's Mansion.

The impact of term limits has been widely written about and debated in California (Kousser, 2005). Proponents tend to decry the notion of a career politician, and see term limits as a way for citizens to serve in public office without holding office for an unreasonable tenure. Critics have asserted that term limits have promoted an unsavory need for politicians to hop from office to office to stay in power and therefore lack the time necessary to learn the nuances of policy concepts. The resulting decrease in the institutional knowledge of legislators emboldens special interests (Kousser, 2005).

It was widely agreed upon by those I spoke with that the recent short stints of legislators in Sacramento, as compared to their predecessors, was a critical element in getting the LCFF through the legislative process. The new generation of legislators are not attached to the old ways of doing business. Furthermore, the recession had effectively dismantled many old legislative education priorities due to lack of funding, and so establishing the LCFF is more about building on a new lot versus bulldozing to rebuild. A senior legislative staffer whom I interviewed mused, "We had so many new members who came in at a time when they were cutting programs. They didn't have their names on programs and so they were not attached to them." Term limits alone are certainly not the

[20] Governing challenges that arose from Proposition 140 inspired action to reform the term limits rules. In 2012, voters approved Proposition 28, which reduced the total number of years elected officials could serve in the Legislature from fourteen to twelve, but made it possible to serve the twelve years in either house or a combination of both. This reform was meant to reduce the "musical chairs" of jumping from one office to the next.

reason for the change in the status quo represented by the enactment of the LCFF, but there is wide agreement among my informants that term limits deserve part of the credit.

The Great Recession spurred the concepts of the national mood and legislator incentives. The difficult budget times largely tied the hands of legislators in that there were few resources to fund new policy initiatives. “When you are making all these cuts, it makes a lot of political sense to push the hard decisions down the road” an informant stated. Rationally, state legislators are happy to let others make difficult and politically unpopular decisions (Hood, 2010). This blame shifting was identified by several informants on why divesting power might have been viable.

On a proposal that would so fundamentally change the governance of the education system it might be expected that the Legislature would be highly active in shaping the policy. However, this was not the case with the LCFF in Sacramento. While the Legislature did its due diligence by holding committee hearings and making some amendments, none significantly altered the core principles of the governor’s original recommendation. The legislative involvement that did occur may be to the benefit of the legacy of the LCFF, as it gave the Legislature some ownership over the new rules of the game. Of course, members always maintain the constitutional right to revisit the legislation if their constituents feel that the implementation is not going according to plan.

It was widely understood around Sacramento that the LCFF was one of the governor’s main priorities in 2013. Having the vantage point of a high popularity rating and solidly Democratic legislature with a history of acquiescing to his agenda, few seriously questioned whether Brown could achieve his objectives. According to my informants, it

became clear to the legislative leaders that the LCFF was going to be a condition of getting the governor's approval on the budget.

A legislative quirk in California is that when governors want to influence education policy they often propose what is known as a trailer bill to the budget. Trailer bills do not go through the normal legislative process and therefore receive little scrutiny and legislative input. Passing the LCFF through a trailer bill was the Brown Administration's original intent, but the administration deferred to the legislative leaders who instead imbedded it in an assembly bill and sent it to the Assembly Committee on Education for hearings. The Legislature made important changes to the original proposal, but none that seriously altered the principles of equity and subsidiarity.

One of the key compromises made between the Legislature and the administration was increasing the base grant that all districts receive regardless of the populations of students served. The chairs of the Assembly and Senate Education Committees both represented legislative districts made up of school districts without substantial populations of students being targeted by the LCFF to receive additional funding and therefore were not poised to significantly gain under the new proposal.

Here it is important to remember the political context of 2013. Nearly all California schools felt the blow of the Great Recession and even in 2013 were not near full recovery. All districts felt the need for more funding, as they had survived several years of barebones budgets. The Education Committee chairs succeeded in altering the formula to make the base grants larger for all districts and the supplemental grants smaller, but the formula was

still a clear nod to equity and made the most substantial investment in students who had traditionally been underserved by the education system in recent California memory.

Given Washington, D.C.'s recent reputation of political dysfunction, the politics around the LCFF provide a stark contrast. There were differences between the education management groups and civil rights groups all the way up until the Governor's signature on the bill – and they continue today – however all parties overwhelmingly reported to me that collaboration was extensive and although there were and continue to be fundamental disagreements, they have largely been kept civil and away from the courts.[21]

The LCFF moved through the heavily controlled Democratic legislature relatively quickly and with no resistance from the opposition party. As a senior policymaker told me with enthusiasm, "The Republicans loved it!" Due to being a small minority of the legislature for about the past decade, Republican members of the California Senate and Assembly have few ideological wins to show at the end of each term. Divesting power from the state in favor of local communities is a cornerstone of the Republican philosophy. Therefore, with the LCFF they found a rare Democratic proposal they could enjoy supporting.

Conclusion: Joining the Streams to Open the Policy Window

An item is unlikely to receive serious consideration unless the three independent streams find their way to each other at the same time. The effect is that a policy window opens and an issue is firmly planted on the government's decision agenda. Kingdon

[21] Plank and Boyd (1994) studied the effects of some education reformers seeking to achieve their goals through institutions that are antipolitical, such as courts and markets.

cautioned, “Policy entrepreneurs must be prepared, their pet proposal at the ready, their special problem well-documented, lest the opportunity pass them by” (p. 165). In 2013, the culmination of a clearly identifiable problem, mutually agreeable solution, the mood of the California citizenry embracing educational equity, the budget to support it, and a determined governor were not lost on the policy entrepreneurs or interest groups around Sacramento. Kingdon used an apt space analogy to describe what happened in the case of the LCFF, “In space shots, the window presents the opportunity for a launch. The target planets are in proper alignment, but will not stay that way for long. Thus the launch must take place when the window is open, lest the opportunity slip away” (p. 166).

With the richest budget in years and sensing that the California mood was on their side, Governor Brown and State Board President Kirst worked to elevate their pet proposal to a problem that had long been a thorn in the government’s side. The clearest early blueprint of the LCFF was the paper authored by Bersin, Kirst, and Liu in 2008. As was argued by the authors of that paper, “California’s school finance system is long overdue for reform. We propose a new system that is more rational, more equitable, and, we believe, politically feasible” (p. 1).

When windows open, they typically do not stay open for long. Kingdon offers different explanations and context for the duration that windows stay open, but the story of the LCFF follows some of political science’s long held policy advice. Kingdon declared, “The short duration of the open window lends powerful credence to the old saying, ‘strike while the iron is hot.’” (p. 170). Striking while the iron was hot was the mentality of Sacramento’s dominant education interests.

The call to fix inadequate and inequitable education had grown very loud and the policy solution of more funding for disadvantaged students was clear. The LCFF keys to success were an education system coming into new funding after being badly damaged by a tough recession; new blood in the Legislature; dissatisfaction with the status quo of categorical funding; and a popular Governor with a penchant for local control. The LCFF was the result.

Chapter Five: Moving from Enactment to Implementation

The previous chapters explained where the LCFF came from and its intended purpose. Illuminating the bridge from enactment and implementation is critical to comprehending the full LCFF picture. The later must not be overlooked, as McDonnell and Weatherford (2016) stated, "The political sustainability of reforms depends on well-designed policy and on effective implementation, and political support and opposition are dynamic, often changing in intensity and configuration over different phases of the policy process" (p. 233). Implementation depends on the strength of the policy tools provided by policymakers, practitioners' understanding of what is expected of them, and their capability to do it. The tools of implantation created by policymakers and how they are understood by practitioners will determine the success of achieving the transparency that the LCFF set out to achieve and if it will be sustained.

Understanding and Interpreting the LCFF

Given the diversity of California's school districts, variability in the implementation of the LCFF is a given. How the LCFF is implemented depends a great deal on how district officials understand the expectations of the LCFF and implement the new law within their local contexts. The RAND Corporation's 1990 change agent study showed that just because local school districts adopted a project that was consistent with federal guidelines, it did not ensure successful implementation because the local contexts varied. According to the study's author, McLaughlin (1990), "What a project *was* mattered less than *how* it was carried out" (p. 12). Furthermore, though not always the case, variability in

implementation can be interpreted as a signal of "a healthy system, one that is shaping and integrating policy in ways best suited to local resources, traditions, and clientele" (p. 13).

In recognition that local implementation has long been a challenge of public policy, researchers at Northwestern University developed a cognitive framework to better understand the ways "implementing agents come to understand their practice, potentially changing their beliefs and attitudes in the process" (Spillane et al., 2002, p. 387). Spillane and colleagues (2002) created a map for how implementing agents must first notice, then frame, interpret, and construct meaning for policy messages. LCFF implementers in local districts, such as elected representatives and appointed administrators, are certain to have different conceptions about using community engagement as a governance tool and these conceptions will surely change as the LCFF experiment continues.

The implementation success rate hinges on not just how district leaders understand the new law and how it should impact district governance, but also how communities understand their role and opportunities provided to engage with the district. Part of a community's understanding is acquired from district leaders. Additional learning comes from education support and advocacy organizations, such as the PTA and other community and grassroots organizations.

Policy Instruments

McDonnell and Elmore (1987) classified different types of policy instruments to bring greater understanding to the "key relationships among problem definition, instrument choice, organizational context, implementation, and its effects" (p. 133). They

saw four broad classifications of policy instruments: mandates, Inducements, capacity-building, and system-changing. McDonnell (2004) added hortatory to the policy toolbox in her book, *Politics, Persuasion, and Educational Testing*. The LCFF provided policy instruments to impact district community engagement that cover all five of the instrument categories. Table 5.1 replicates McDonnell and Elmore's (1987) table from their article and adds the hortatory category according to McDonnell's (2004) findings. Table 5.2 shows how the five policy instruments are embedded in the LCFF and my findings on how the instruments were being utilized in the four districts.

Table 5.1: Policy Instrument Assumptions and Consequences

	Assumptions	Consequences
Mandates	**1) Action required regardless of capacity; 2) Action would not occur with desired frequency or consistency without rule.**	**1) Coercion required; 2) Create uniformity, reduce variation; 3) Policy contains information necessary for compliance; 4) Adversarial relations between initiators, targets; 5) Minimum Standards.**
Inducements	**1) Valued good would not be produced with desired frequency or consistency in absence of additional money; 2) Individuals, agencies vary in capacity to produce; money elicits performance.**	**1) Capacity exists; money needed to mobilize it; 2) As tolerable range of variation narrows, oversight costs increase; 2) As tolerable range of variation narrows, oversight costs increase; 3) Most likely to work when capacity exists.**
Capacity-building	**1) Knowledge, skill competence required to produce future value; or 2) Capacity in its own right or instrumental to other purposes.**	**1) Capacity does not exist; investment needed to mobilize it; 2) Tangible present benefits serve as proxies for future, intangible benefits.**
System-changing	**1) Existing institutions, existing incentives cannot produce desired results; 2) Changing distribution of authority changes what is produced.**	**1) Institutional factors incite action; provokes defensive response; 2) New institutions raise new problems of mandates, inducements, capacities.**
Hortatory	**1) The expected information is produced and understandable to policy targets; 2) The values appealed to are strong enough and broadly accepted to prompt widespread action; 3) Targets have sufficient incentive and capacity to respond; 4) Targets' responses will be consistent with the policy's goals; 5) Costs will be relatively small and will be borne primarily by policy targets.**	**1) Targets will mobilize, based on strongly held values, and will act on information. Actions may be diffuse, unpredictable, and varied.**

Table 5.2: Policy Instruments as Used by the LCFF

	How Imbedded in the LCFF	Findings
Mandates	**1) Districts must engage their communities and complete an LCAP according to the template, which includes goal setting action planning, and budgeting; 2) The LCAP must be public; 3) The board must adopt the LCAP.**	**1) Although community engagement is a proven practice that administrators are aware of, districts reported more engagement because of LCFF mandates; 2) No reported adversarial relations between initiators, targets; 3) Minimum standards have been observed.**
Inducements	**1) Money is allocated explicitly for students from low-income families, English learners, and foster youth.**	**1) District administrators cite lack of personnel and financial capacity as key reasons why engagement was not more robust pre-LCFF; 2) There is variation in districts' capacity for engagement.**
Capacity-building	**1) More funding *and* flexibility for utilizing the extra funding; 2) New learning opportunities to engage the community and improve with practice.**	**1) Knowledge on how to engage and ability to engage should not be assumed; 2) There is variation in districts' pre-LCFF capacity for engagement.**
System-changing	**1) The LCFF shifts power from the Legislature to local districts.**	**1) New found authority of local districts makes community input more actionable.**
Hortatory	**1) Guiding questions for engagement in the LCAP template are suggestive; 2) The transparency required by the LCAP assumes that districts will be ambitious about engaging their communities and the community will mobilize to ensure that their preferences are recorded; 3) Information in LCAPs will motivate community groups to act – in support or in protest.**	**1) Districts went well beyond what was required in their outreach. 2) Some communities actively used the LCFF process to further their agendas.**

Mandates, inducements, capacity-building, system-changing, and hortatory address the range of instrument options available for addressing a particular problem as well as the political and practical context at hand. Although policymakers most likely choose policy instruments out of political and practical convenience rather than systematic thought, theoretical considerations of the classes of policy options are useful for building knowledge of effective policy enactment and implementation.

McDonnell and Elmore (1987) acknowledged that policy instruments will not always fit neatly into one exclusive category, but will likely be recognizable across multiple categories. Applying McDonnell and Elmore's conceptual framework to the LCFF shows this to be true, as elements of all five categories are evident in the new law. The order in which the scholars presented their categories – mandates, inducements, capacity-building, and system-changing – and later hortatory – is a logical order for considering the LCFF.

McDonnell and Elmore stated that "Mandates are rules governing the actions of individuals and agencies. The expected effect of mandates is compliance, or behavior consistent with what the rules prescribe" (p. 138). The LCFF mandate most relevant to this dissertation is the requirement that districts must engage their communities. The LCAP also imbedded other mandates intended to ensure transparency, such as requiring that districts publish what goals they intend to achieve, how they mean to achieve their set goals, and how they plan to pay for the initiatives or programs achieving their goals requires.

In addition to the democratic theory of education as described in Chapter Two, community engagement has been an accepted best practice since the 1965 ESEA Act called for local Title I advisory councils. More recently, Stone and colleagues (2001) launched the civic capacity project that found that broad community support is a critical ingredient for achieving and sustaining the political will necessary for school reform. However, my district informants recognized that the community engagement opportunities they made available prior to the LCFF were inadequate. They also reported that their community engagement efforts quickly became much improved as a result of LCFF mandates.

Prior to the LCFF, state statute required very little direction for how districts should engage their communities. Although California Education Code mandates that schools convene school site councils to give input on important governance questions and districts also have had to convene Title I advisory councils, these two bodies are far cries from the broad community engagement spurred by the LCFF.

The community engagement mandates within the LCFF blend easily into the inducements category as the additional money given to districts is considered. Per McDonnell and Elmore, "Inducements are transfers of money to individuals or agencies in return for the production of goods or services" (p. 138). Providing new funds and flexibility to districts was a clear inducement to increase the quality and quantity of community engagement.

However, mandates and inducements as policy instruments do not give the full picture. Inducements are utilized as a policy instrument when the capacity already exists and money is needed to mobilize it. These conditions vary from district to district. For example, among my districts, the observers might view Large Urban District 1 as already having the capacity for wide-scale engagement based on its large communications operation. The other districts pale in comparison. Additional funds might induce Large Urban District 1 to direct its existing communications capacity towards the goals of the LCFF.

Providing districts with less established capacity to perform high-quality community engagement leads to McDonnell and Elmore's third category of capacity-building. They define capacity building as, "The transfer of money to individuals or agencies for the

purpose of investment in future benefits – material, intellectual, or human resources" (p. 139). Such investments were the clear aim of policymakers, and all four case study districts delivered.

The LCFF's goal to inspire community engagement spotlighted an important disconnect between successful engagement practices and administrators' knowledge and ability. Although funding was certainly a need that was holding districts back from the quantity and quality of widespread engagement, so too was knowledge and experience. Mandating that districts engage their communities makes the false assumption that this is something all administrators know how to do and are skilled at doing. Similar assumptions about members of the community knowing how to navigate the engagement process are also questionable, as civic learning opportunities are unequal across schools and districts and some citizens know more about the governing process than others (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1997; Neimi & Junn, 1998; Keller, 2010).

Observations in my districts made clear that some administrators and the citizens that show up to participate have more talent than others for the actions that make for effective engagement, such as listening and communication skills. Humphrey and Koppich (2014) reported that administrators are learning in the process and expect to get better with practice. By definition, capacity building cannot reach full implementation immediately, but will happen over time.

System-changing categorizes the transfer of official authority. This is undoubtedly a major accomplishment of the LCFF and has important implications for community engagement. As stated in a previous chapter, with the LCFF, the Legislature relinquished an

incredible amount of control to individual districts. Prior to the LCFF, districts operated in a world of categorical funding where the state exercised a large amount of control over district budgets by providing unique pots of money for pre-determined objectives. Although high-quality community engagement would still be likely to produce positive benefits, the hands of district officials were largely tied by the state Legislature and lacked the ability to fully accept community input – particularly when it came to budgeting priorities, which in turn affect programing. Empowering districts with the majority of budgeting authority increases district officials' abilities to account for the wishes of their communities.

Although powerful, the first four instruments described do not fully explain why districts went beyond what was required of them by state statute. Hortatory instruments provide information that if acted upon, change institutions and institutional behavior. Hortatory instruments rely not on rewards or sanctions, but persuasion (Schneider & Ingram, 1990; McDonnell, 2004). The LCAP is a clear mandate, but the guiding questions offered by the State Board of Education in the LCAP template are technically suggestive. By providing these guiding questions, the state is providing a resource that the districts can use to comply with the LCFF's intent for broad community engagement.

The LCAP template also calls for districts to give a narrative on how the public has been engaged and the impact their engagement had in the final plan, as well as the efforts and information that were employed by the district to engage the public. It could be embarrassing for a district to only strictly adhere to state statute and not embrace the spirit of widespread engagement. Also, the watchful eye of civil rights groups helped to set

the bar higher. The LCAP is a hortatory instrument because the information that districts must put in the plan about their choices and actions is readily available to the public, and therefore can be acted upon by people inside the district and the community.

Conclusion

To varying degrees, the LCFF created policy instruments that were mandates, inducements, capacity building, system changing, and hortatory. Being the main accountability mechanism, many of the instruments were imbedded in the LCAP. The LCAP requires districts to heed their communities in the writing of the LCAP, complete the template, which provides guiding questions for engagement and requires that districts set goals, action plan, and tie the plan to their budgets, and adopt their final plans in public. Prior to the LCFF, districts sited lack of funding and personnel as reasons why they were not engaging their communities more robustly, although district capacity for engagement varied. The LCFF also shifted much authority for education governance from the state to the local level and provides information to potentially persuade districts to change their institutional behavior. By combining the five policy instruments, policy makers have attempted to create more transparency in how school districts are governed.

Chapter Six: Implementation in Four Northern California Districts

I now turn to the four districts in which I conducted my case studies individually before comparing them with each other. After spending dozens of hours in the four districts, getting to know members of the board, senior administrators, community leaders, and a few frequent meeting attendees, I found a strong sense of distinct cultures existing in each place. Although she was looking at schools and I at districts, I attempted to follow the model of Lawrence Lightfoot (1983) when she sought to "capture the culture of these schools, their essential features, their generic character, the values that define their curricular goals and institutional structures, and their individual styles and rituals" (p. 6). Viewing districts in this way revealed vital complexities of running organizations that are educating thousands of unique people. In thinking about how culture affects engagement, patterns emerged that can be categorized by who attends district meetings and the attitudes of meeting attendees and district officials.

Table 6.1 offers quick snapshots of phenomena I saw within the districts that contribute to their cultures. I took careful note of how district meetings felt. Such factors include how many people attend, who attends, who speaks and what they speak about, and interaction with district officials. There were also noticeable actions that districts took to make their communities feel welcomed. Food was present at most meetings – sometimes more appetizing that others – and childcare was also common.

Table 6.1: District Profiles at a Glance

Large Urban District 1 • High meeting attendance • Meeting attendees are diverse in the interests they represent • Public comments are both positive and negative • District officials are proactive about engaging the community • Numerous community groups are proactive about mobilizing members to participate	**Large Urban District 2** • Low meeting attendance • Meeting attendees are mostly community groups (non-parents) • High agreement about lack of district responsiveness • Public comments are often negative • Some district officials are proactive in engaging the community
Affluent Suburban District • Low meeting attendance • Meeting attendees are diverse in the interests they represent • Public comments are often positive	**High Needs Suburban District** • High meeting attendance • Meeting attendees are mostly staff, although the community and parents are also represented • Public comments are both positive and negative • District officials are proactive about engaging the community

In the following district profiles, I offer my observations in an attempt to hone in on events or actions that are typical in each district, describe the students and the place, and explain how the district approached the LCFF and how closely it incorporated community input in the LCAP. I studied the first year of implementation (2013-2014) retrospectively and was present in the four districts often in the second (2014-2015) and third (2015-2016) years.

Large Urban District 1

Large Urban District 1 spans a community with deep roots of political activism. On several occasions during the course of my study, protesters shut down freeways as a part

of the Black Lives Matter movement. I witnessed more activism in district politics here than in any of the other three districts. Board meetings could be raucous affairs with interest groups organizing their members to bring voice to the concern of the moment.

Not all meetings were well attended, but were agenda dependent. For example, if a charter school decision comes before the board, the meeting space will almost certainly be packed. This is because there are large charter management organizations within the district that see turning out at school board meetings as effective for their advocacy and have experience organizing their supporters. At one meeting, attendees were organized to the extent that they wore matching tee shirts and held big signs. Board meetings in Large Urban District 1 so often go well past midnight – due in large part to public comment – that the Board entertained the idea of having two separate meetings, one for public comment and one for board business. By day, the space typically used for board meetings is a large multipurpose room. The board sits on a stage and about 100 chairs are set out below for meeting attendees.

Large Urban District 1 has a student population of around 45,000 students, which makes it one of the top twenty largest districts in the state. The student population is about forty-five percent Hispanic or Latino, thirty percent African American, fifteen percent Asian, and ten percent White. About thirty percent of the student population classify as English learners and seventy-five percent of students qualify for the National School Lunch Program.

The district operates over 120 schools, which are located across a wide geographical area. Academic performance as well as student diversity vary widely across

the schools. Although some schools are among the top performers in the state, others are at the bottom. As is consistent with some of the neighborhoods across the district, some schools are diverse, while others are racially and ethnically homogeneous. Schools with small populations of students from low-income families, English learners, and foster youth tend to perform better than schools with large populations of these students, but it is not a given. There are schools in high-needs areas that are high performing and there are schools in affluent areas that are performing below the state average.

The district's jurisdiction covers a lot of ground, but it aligns with municipal boundaries. The district administration reports a close working relationship with the mayor and City Hall. Although City Hall exercises no control over the district, the recently elected mayor has made education and partnering with the district a priority on the city's agenda.

During LCFF implementation, the district saw a typical amount of turnover in senior administration, including the superintendent,[22] yet membership of the board has remained consistent since 2012. All incumbents were reelected in 2014 and 2016, although significant money was spent by interest groups on several contests.

Adhering to state statute, the district convened two distinct bodies to officially engage the community and advise on the LCAP. The membership of both the LCAP Parent Advisory Committee and the District English Learner Advisory Committee come from nominations of the district's school site councils and councils representing different areas of the district. The process is somewhat complex and sometimes nominations are delayed

[22] A Brookings Institute Report found that the tenure of superintendents is typically between three and four years (Chingos, Whitehurst, & Lindquist, 2014). The authors of the report did not find evidence that this short-term employment affected student test scores.

for want of a quorum at various steps in the process. Some areas, particularly areas encompassing communities where students from low-income families and English learners live, have struggled to maintain representation on the committees. Turnover has been high on the committees across the district.

Large Urban District 1 experienced more stakeholder involvement in the LCFF process than did the other three case study districts. This is because of the mutually reinforcing effect of stakeholders demanding information and seats at the table, and the district's organizational design to be inclusive of stakeholders and forthcoming with information. Since signing up for Large Urban District 1's email alerts at the beginning of my study I have received dozens of emails each month and often multiple emails each day.

Interest groups, known as partner organizations in Large Urban District 1, have played strategic roles throughout the LCFF process. They mostly left the LCFF committees to go about their work, but mobilized supporters to attend and give comment when there were high impact decisions being made, such as around the budget.

There are dozens of community groups across Large Urban District 1, as can be expected in a large urban area. My observations saw roughly six partner organizations have a regular presence at district events. The missions of the partnership organizations are wide-ranging. Some groups have broad missions, such as social justice or the legal rights of students, while others are more narrowly focused on advocating for foster youth or Asian American students. Although the partner organizations are often critical of district performance, they generally have a strong working relationship with the administration and school board, and the district often acts on their recommendations.

A senior administrator added complexity to how the district acts on community recommendations and makes stakeholders feel heard. The administrator asserted that there is strong agreement between the district and the community on what needs to be done. But even though all sides might agree on what needs to be done, merely putting it into action is not satisfying to community groups. In part because of the district's long history of activism, stakeholders are not inclined to give new initiatives the support the district needs to succeed unless stakeholders are driving the plan. The administrator saw their role in running the district as trying to be an invisible arm of the community's will. In this vision, the district plants seeds within the community and then waits to see what grows.

Community partners do not shy away from criticism and have well developed channels to deliver concerns to senior officials. A board member told me that he heard from multiple community partners that they were unhappy with their district's LCFF outreach efforts. The official stated, "Yeah, people did come to the table and say, your community engagement sucks." In comparison with other districts in the first year of LCFF, Urban District 1's engagement was actually robust. However, this board member's story reflects the district's culture of working towards improvement and vocal and assertive community stakeholders.

Being a place of immense wealth, and also dire poverty, Urban District 1 faces the challenge of bridging these divides. From board member comments, to emails to the community from the superintendent, to meeting agendas, the district's messaging is unequivocal about its mission of equity. This sentiment overlaps well with one of the LCFF's

key principles. At the meetings I attended, giving more resources to the schools that serve the neediest students was uncontroversial.

My survey instrument did not include questions that would have been revealing of a respondent's socio-economic status. However, I did notice slight differences in how administrators conducted meetings that were held at schools in low-income neighborhoods versus schools in affluent neighborhoods. Perhaps an action of cultural relevance was when burritos were served at a meeting in a mostly Latino neighborhood and sushi was served at a meeting hosted by a school with a majority of White parents. Both were delicious, but also an indication that the district was catering to specific audiences.

Large Urban District 1's LCAP acknowledges the input of multiple stakeholders. For the teachers, Large Urban District 1's LCAP allocated significant funds to create opportunity for peer-to-peer professional learning. Increasing services for students with special needs also stands out in the LCAP as a major investment. In all four districts a key theme from parent input was that they wanted their children to feel safe and supported at school. Large Urban District 1 recognized these sentiments by investing in programs to train teachers to be culturally competent and provide more socio-emotional services.

At a meeting I attended of Large Urban District 1's English Learner Advisory Committee,[23] much of the meeting was focused on data about the district's English learner

[23] The meeting was conducted entirely in Spanish. Not speaking Spanish myself, the district provided me with a translator.

students and the challenges of becoming reclassified as English proficient.[24] Committee members expressed concern that English learner students were not receiving enough services to help them become reclassified. Next, district staff offered some ideas to the committee on strategies that the district might pursue, such as increasing one-on-one coaching and creating more professional development opportunities for teachers. After some discussion among the committee, the staff suggestions were deemed acceptable. Strategies for English learner reclassification, dual language programs, and teacher professional development focused on English learners were all included in Large Urban District 1's LCAP.

Like the information that was presented to the English learner advisory committee, investments stated in the LCAP reflect sophisticated knowledge of proven educational practices that most lay stakeholders would be unlikely to know about. However, upon learning about details of LCAP strategies and their intended impact, most citizens would likely be supportive. Summer learning and alternative discipline programs are two examples that stand out in Large Urban District 1's LCAP as two large investments that many education reformers would cheer, but the lay public would require more information than is in the LCAP to fully grasp the district's intent and how the district's intent reflects input from the public.

Inferring from my interviews with district officials, it is likely that the district would be making many of the same investments without the community input it received. Yet,

[24] State and federal law requires that schools whose primary language is not English to be assessed for English proficiency. Students in California who do not test as proficient according to the California English Development Test (CDELT) are entitled to extra services.

Urban District 1 exemplifies why the LCAP and the community engagement and transparency that it seeks to invoke empowers good governance. By assertively soliciting input from the community on the kind of schools it desires, leaning on partner organizations to get the district's message out to the community and bring community preferences back to the district, and transparently showing how the community's input contributed to the district's goals and plans for reaching the goals, the governing process appeared authentic. Harkening back to the APSA's Task Force on Civic Engagement, when citizens participate in governing, not only do citizens feel gratified as a result of their participation, but governing decisions more closely align to their preferences and are more legitimate (Macedo, 2005).

Conclusion. Large Urban District 1 has many unique constituencies to satisfy, but a stable school board and well regarded superintendent seemed up to the task. From tracking my observations of the preferences publicly voiced by meeting attendees and the district's self-reported notes on community preferences that were collected through multiple methods, Large Urban District 1's LCAP aligned with the will of the community.

Not everything about the governing process in Large Urban District 1 was smooth, and in fact things were often contentious. Furthermore, the academic achievement across the district presents grim problems of equity. However, if the district stays on a similar path to the one I observed, its serious approach to engagement and transparency will provide a ready test case in future years for better understanding if the democratic process can strengthen the impact of governing institutions.

Large Urban District 2

As the LCFF was unfolding in Sacramento, Large Urban District 2 was in turmoil financially and politically. Over the last few years, the board and superintendent were widely criticized for mismanaging funds from a voter approved bond for facility repair. Aside from scandal, Large Urban District 2 could politically be considered a ground zero for California's charter school debate. Philanthropists and the California Charter School Association have flooded recent school board elections with campaign funds for pro-charter candidates. The local teacher's union mostly works in opposition to the charter school backers.

Board meetings are sparsely attended, except for a few professional organizers who work for groups that want to have an impact on the district's governing decisions. The groups I observed typically had a focus on advocating for social justice broadly, although some also had a mission that was specific to a certain race/ethnicity. The organizers sometimes refer to themselves as "watchdogs." This mentality grew out of what many felt was a lack of transparency by the district. The watchdogs sit on one side of the auditorium where board meetings are held and district staff sit on the other. The watchdogs typically speak multiple times during the meeting when there is opportunity for public comment. Occasionally also present in seats in close proximity to the organizers, and far away from administrators, are professionals who do not organize themselves, but support organizing organizations. I found one local family foundation executive director whose foundation funds community groups working for social justice and also funds pro-charter causes. I spoke with another executive director of an organization that is heavily funded by

education reformers who are blatantly pro-charter. There is not an obvious connection between social justice groups and charter supporters, although some charters do have explicit social justice missions. The congeniality I saw on the watchdog side of the auditorium seemed to be not because of a common cause, but because of bonding over an us versus the district mentality.

Although few citizens attend board meetings, over 100,000 people typically cast their vote in school board elections.[25] This is more than Large Urban District 1 and could be because Large Urban District 2 elects board members at-large, while Large Urban District 1 carves board seats up geographically by sub-district.[26]

Large Urban District 2 serves about 30,700 students. The student population is over half Hispanic or Latino, twenty percent identify as African American, ten percent identify as Asian, and about ten percent identify as White. About thirty-five percent of students classify as English Learners and seventy percent qualify for the National School Lunch Program.

The boundaries of Large Urban District 2 are unwieldy, as nearly sixty schools span across the boundaries of several municipalities and unincorporated areas, which makes civic partnerships complicated. There is no doubt that building partnerships with multiple

[25] Because Large Urban District 2 spans across multiple municipalities the data needed to calculate the percentage of districtwide voter turnout is not readily available. However, when comparing the total of votes with other neighboring districts of similar size, the total number of votes cast is greater than the median.

[26] Although open to debate, it appears that electing officials at-large disadvantages African American and Latino candidates, but holding elections by sub-district helps level the playing field (Welch, 1990). I did not find studies about the impact of either electoral method on school board elections or turnout. Most school boards in the United States are elected at-large (Hess, 2002).

municipalities is more difficult than focusing on only one relationship. While the other sample districts can build partnerships with a single city council and mayor, Large Urban District 2 has several to contend with. The superintendent did solicit written feedback for the LCAP from agencies of the largest city within its jurisdiction. The city complied and the feedback was incorporated into the plan. It seems that Large Urban District 2's sprawling boundaries also make it difficult for the district to establish an identity to rally behind. Other districts were running marketing campaigns that attempted to celebrate their identities as a community.

The superintendent who saw the initial implementation of the LCFF had a long tenure in office; however, a new superintendent was recently appointed. Based on interviews and reports in the press, the superintendent preferred to keep the community at arm's length and only engaged in outreach on the district's own terms, such as pre-planned listening sessions, unless there was pressure to do otherwise. For example, the superintendent was initially reluctant to include some socially focused community groups in the LCFF process, but caved under pressure.

On the election front, there has been high turnover on the board. Only one incumbent member of the board has been re-elected in the last three elections. The members of the board whose terms were expiring in 2016 chose not to seek reelection. Some told me that they did not care to be a part of the bloodbath that charter proponents intended to make the election. Prior elections centered around the lack of oversight by the board of financial mismanagement by the district.

Just prior to the enactment of the LCFF, Large Urban District 2 took on a large strategic planning effort in which it reported including broad community involvement. Once it had the duty of implementing LCFF and devising an LCAP, the district largely shoe-horned its strategic planning effort into the LCAP, although additional LCFF specific meetings were also held.

Large Urban District 2 had by far the largest LCFF advisory committee of my districts and also held the fewest committee meetings. Whereas Large Urban District 1 created a system to appoint committee members to represent geographic areas encompassing multiple schools, Large Urban District 2 decided to create a seat on the committee for each of its schools. The district added additional seats for community groups, such as the local NAACP and organization that advocates for foster youth, that it thought would be interested in being a part of the process. Not all the seats were filled, but a group of about thirty usually attended the three annual meetings that are called for in the committee's by-laws.

Large Urban District 2 spent more time on process than the other districts I observed. At the beginning of the second year of implementation, elections were held for the leadership positions on the committee, such as chair and vice chair. Debate and voting took about two hours and eventually led to the unseating of the current chair. No one made comments that reflected poorly on the former chair's work, in fact they were complimentary of her work ethic. However, a challenger was nominated and she made a notably better speech, which seemed to make the difference when tallying the votes.

Large Urban District 2 relied heavily on its strategic planning work that it conducted just prior to the LCFF being adopted. During this process, the district reported reaching over 2,500 community members through a variety of methods. As a result, Large Urban District 2 derived six strategies that the superintendent felt were representative of the input that the district collected. They are: create high expectations, embrace collective ownership, prioritize accountability, support quality instruction, invest in the whole child, and innovate. These themes were evident in the district's LCAP and the district was transparent that its strategic planning effort was used heavily in writing the LCAP.

Large Urban District 2 had the advantage of its engagement work from its strategic planning process and could refine previous community input. At an LCFF listening session for the community, the district administration collected input on several targeted questions. After a presentation on the LCFF from the superintendent, meeting attendees broke into small groups to discuss some predetermined questions. While some districts asked broad questions at their community meetings, such as how can your child's school help them succeed, the questions asked by Large Urban District 2 were quite specific. One question focused on what services families needed and gave some guiding examples, such as vision, engagement for non-English speaking parents, or healthcare. The district also asked about the specific teacher supports the community wanted to see implemented. To the more general question of what services could the district provide to support the students targeted by the LCFF proposals ranged from smaller class sizes to more school counselors to raising the graduation rate

Large Urban District 2's LCAP does not show any glaring omissions of community input, but because the plan was written in jargon and generalities it is impossible to trace the community's input with precision. Large Urban District 2 indicated that it would make big investments in the goals advocated for in the public forum, such as college ready graduates, but gave few details on the actions it would take. Other goals Large Urban District 2 stated in its LCAP were typical of what a competent district administration would be working towards, such as increasing attendance and decreasing suspensions.

Conclusion. For about the last decade, the governance team of Large Urban District 2 has been hampered by perceptions from the community of mismanagement. Whether true or not, this reputation has made partnering with the community difficult. The dynamic of a community versus the district mentality was present at board meetings during public comment and where attendees chose to sit. Looking forward, a majority of newly elected school board members and new superintendent hold the opportunity to change the district culture of how it engages the public.

Affluent Suburban District

As if operating on auto-pilot, Affluent Suburban District's sixteen schools have the reputation for being among the top public schools in the state. It is also a place where many parents of the nearly 14,800 students live to commute to their high-tech jobs, which is a moderate drive away. The district takes great pride in its marching bands, which operated at full force during the Great Recession thanks to donations from the community.

Board meetings are typically quiet and efficient affairs where the public portion of the meeting lasts not much more than an hour. About twenty chairs are provided for staff and members of the public and they are sparsely filled. Affluent Suburban District is the only district in my sample to have an active district-wide Parent Teacher Association (PTA). The PTA is dialed into the happenings of the district and also active in the larger state PTA structure.

The small numbers of students that Affluent Suburban District serves who are targeted by the extra funds in the LCFF creates a distinct contrast to the other sample districts. About half of the student population identifies as White, thirty percent identifies as Asian, ten percent identifies as Hispanic or Latino, and less than two percent identifies as African American. About five percent of students classify as English learners and five percent qualify for the National School Lunch Program.

Based on their large percentages of English learners, students from low-income families, and foster youth, the other districts receive multiple millions of dollars in extra funding. In contrast, Affluent Suburban District received only about half a million dollars in the form of the supplemental grant for the 2014-2015 school year.[27] This relatively small amount of money precludes the bold approaches in Affluent Suburban District that other districts have taken with their supplemental and concentration dollars. Affluent Suburban District does not receive any concentration dollars, as its English learner, low-income

[27] As described in footnote 5 in Chapter 1, supplemental dollars are given depending on the population of targeted students served. Concentration dollars are given if a district serves more than fifty-five percent targeted students. Affluent Suburban District only receives a modest amount of supplemental dollars.

student, and foster youth populations do not reach the fifty-five percent threshold that triggers the concentration grant.

Even so, the LCFF's charge of funding schools equitably was well received by district officials and community partners. One senior administrator reported that the district was eager to:

> Level the playing field for the students who have a greater need based upon their socio-economic level...I'm going to say seventy percent to eighty percent of students have parents who have resources to buy what they need to correlate for being college and career ready upon graduation. One thing that the LCFF funding allows us to do is to provide those services to students who won't have those at home. Such as college counseling, such as field trips to universities and colleges, such as extra tutorials for them to be able to do that. More intense support for English language acquisition, more outreach bridging the home to the school with parent liaisons to speak the language of students who may not have English as their first language. So, it gives us some capacity to be able to provide those services.

The modest funds Affluent Suburban District received compared to districts serving higher numbers of students targeted by the LCFF did not allow the district to fund the administrator's aspirations for under-resourced students, but most topics were discussed by the district's Local Control Advisory Committee.

Affluent Suburban District's close to twenty schools are located within the same city limits on serene plots of land with many oak trees in sight. There always seems to be ample room for student activities. Most of the school complexes show their age, but are well

maintained. One of the big annual events for the town is when the district's two high school football teams faceoff.

The district has a friendly working relationship with its city. Every other month, two members of the city council and two members of the school board hold a joint meeting that is open to the public. Issues such as traffic safety and school bonds are typically discussed. Like regular board meetings, attendance is sparse for the joint meetings.

School board elections are contested, but the advantage of incumbency has proven valuable, as board members seeking re-election in the last several cycles have prevailed. A dominant issue of a recent campaign centered on the district's decision to shift the academic calendar to start the school year earlier. This change was upsetting to a lot of parents. School board elections in my other districts tend to focus on bigger issues, such as school performance and student learning, but this is already assumed in Affluent Suburban District.

When it comes to retaining senior administrators, it has become an obvious problem. Several superintendents have come and gone over the last couple of years for ambiguous reasons. While embarrassing for the district, the high superintendent turnover has not seemed to dampen the community's satisfaction with its public schools.

Affluent Suburban District created multiple opportunities for stakeholders to give input on the LCAP, which it called its listening campaign. In the first year of LCFF implementation, twelve different listening campaign events were held. There was only one opportunity for the public at large to express their preferences. Most meetings were targeted specifically for particular interests, such as special needs or English learner

parents. Three of the outreach meetings were with high school students, and others were held with employee unions. In the public meeting, small groups considered questions, such as “What do students need to succeed?” before reporting back to the larger group. Dominant themes were taking care of the whole child, which was taken to mean that the district would provide services in addition to academic services. Mental health and socio-emotional learning supports were mentioned most often.

Affluent Suburban District created a committee to consider feedback collected from the listening campaign and make recommendations for what should be prioritized in the LCAP. Appointed by the board, the Local Control Advisory Committee meets monthly. It was decided that there would be fourteen members on the committee and that eight seats on the committee would be filled by parents who have students attending district schools. The other committee spots are filled to represent different interests, such as, classified staff and teachers. While technically on the committee, the committee members representing special interests did not often attend the meetings. Additionally, one student is appointed to the committee. During the first year of implementation there were 26 applicants for the seven parent spots on the committee. Board members cast public votes from the list of applicants to fill the seats.

The regular attendance, level of attention, and participation of the members made clear that they took their charge seriously. It is this body where I saw the strongest resemblance to deliberation. Together, members digested and acquired information that was presented by district staff and open-mindedly discussed the best course of action. A strong example of the committee’s deliberative nature and community investment in the

public schools is its decision to recommend the addition of a library resources officer. When it was determined that the district might not be able to afford the cost of this position, an energetic conversation began about how the community might fundraise to make up the difference. Due to the energetic interest in seeing this position filled, the district shifted its priorities to make it happen.

The community's pride in Affluent Suburban District is justified given the high marks its students continually receive on standardized tests as compared to the rest of the state. However, the regular high performance of the district's students occasionally leads to benign neglect when it comes to governing. Several times I saw district administrators brush off questions from the Local Control Advisory Committee with a comment such as, "We don't need to worry about that here, we are one of the best in the state." This seemed to satisfy the members of the committee.

Affluent Suburban District was given relatively few LCFF funds compared to the other three case study districts as a result of its small population of targeted students. The biggest LCFF investment that Affluent Suburban District made as stated in its LCAP was in implementing the Common Core State Standards. This was not a priority of the public at large, but agreeable to the district's teachers who were nervous about taking on a new challenge. The large investment was not necessarily a reflection of the district ignoring the wishes of its community, but a reality of embracing new standards. Another large investment that the district made was investing in technology to provide a Twenty-First Century education, which became a catch phrase in the community. The focus on

technology is probably related to the community being heavily involved in the tech industry.

Conclusion. Affluent Suburban District's above average student achievement did not appear to be a result of the community being engaged in the governing of the district. However, while attendance at board meetings is typically sparse, the district's Local Control Advisory Committee showed impressive dedication to advising the district as representative voices of the community by holding monthly meetings and being highly engaged in the material that was presented to them by district administrators. Affluent Suburban District had the least to gain in funds from the LCFF, but even still, the new law's policy instruments were effective at achieving more robust community engagement and more transparency in the planning and budgeting process than before.

High Needs Suburban District

Often described as located in a "blue collar town," High Needs Suburban District is about a 45-minute drive from several major metropolitan areas, where many residents commute to for work. Although many residents commute out of town, the school district is the largest employer in the city. Some also describe the city as "sleepy," but it is growing, as housing prices remain more affordable here than other nearby areas.

Having many members of the community as commuters creates challenges for engagement. As one board member stated, "See a lot of our families are working one and two jobs. And we have the highway traffic jam. A lot of times our staff will say let's have

honors night and have it start at six o'clock. And I'm saying half the parents are still on the freeway, they can't get home by that time."

Even though many residents might leave town for work, there is a strong sense of community. In recent elections, several candidates for the school board and city council touted being products of High Needs Suburban District schools as one of their chief qualifications for office. Several school principals and other district staff whom I met at meetings also boasted of being "homegrown."

The Rotary and Kiwanis Clubs are active in the community, as are several predominantly African American churches. These groups are not active in district governance other than being consulted, as they were for the LCAP. When the relatively new superintendent was hired, the board stated in the contract that the superintendent must join either the Rotary or Kiwanis Club.

Other than Rotary, Kiwanis, and the churches, I did not find any strong organized group involvement other than the teacher union, but the union work in High Needs Suburban District typically takes place behind the scenes. I did talk with several regular meeting participants who carefully study most board meeting agendas and seriously plan their remarks for public comment. These meeting attendees are best described as active citizens, as they were not representing an organization or group. The active citizens did not necessarily come to the meetings to advocate for one issue, but offered public comment on agenda items on which they had an opinion.

Like many of the district's facilities, the district office is a non-descript decade's old building. The board room is a small space that can only comfortably fit a few dozen

attendees. Because of this, overflow seating is always available in the entrance way of the building, which is just outside of the board room. Audio speakers are setup in the entrance way so that spectators can hear the meeting proceedings and depending on the angle, they can see the board and superintendent sitting on the dais.

School board meetings can verge on festive, as the superintendent makes a point of infusing ceremony with business. On one occasion, I witnessed a performance by a high school cheerleading team to open a meeting. Many of the cheerleaders' parents also attended; however, both parents and cheerleaders left after the performance and did not stay for the board business.

On another occasion, students attended with their parents to receive awards. On yet another occasion, many chairs were filled by a high school social studies class that was attending as part of a class assignment. It is typical for various people serving on the district staff to be recognized for various accomplishments or milestones and for district staff working on various programs or projects to be required to attend if their work is being discussed. For example, when an assistant superintendent was reporting to the board on a parent engagement program that was created using LCFF funds, about a dozen parent liaisons who were hired because of the program stood with the administrator during the testimony.

High Needs Suburban District has a student population of about 10,800 students. Its student population identifies as about sixty percent Hispanic or Latino, twenty percent African American, five percent Asian and five percent White. About thirty-five percent of

the student population classify as English learners and eighty-five percent of students qualify for the National School Lunch Program.

The district's thirteen schools are scattered across its city's relatively small boundaries. Several school sites harken back to earlier periods of economic growth for the city, such as a period with a large military presence and a mining boom. Although the appearance of many buildings is dated, the community has regularly supported their upkeep by passing facility bonds and there has been construction of new facilities in the last decade. The construction of a new school became controversial at a 2015 board meeting because parents were concerned about safety issues arising from the entrance being on a busy street. For practical reasons of changing a construction project already underway, the district did not meet the parents demands of changing the design of the new school, but the board asked the superintendent to consider rules that could be put into place to maximize student safety. This example of school construction seems to be emblematic of how the district governing team hears and responds to community input. The board and superintendent generally want to adhere to the wishes of the community, but are sometimes constrained by practical reasons. Being unable or unwilling to overcome constraints was not always satisfying to High Needs Suburban District's community, but there was a sense that the board and superintendent were doing their best, and therefore, the community generally gave them the benefit of the doubt and I did not observe any hot-tempered responses to district decisions.

The district office for High Needs Suburban District shares a parking lot with the civic center, which makes cross-sectoral collaboration convenient. The superintendent has

regular meetings with the city manager and two members of the school board have regular public meetings with two of their counterparts on the city council.

In the last three cycles, school board elections have been civil. While incumbency is not a guarantee of victory, the board has been largely stable. No significant money is raised or spent from outside groups. Raising student achievement has been a typical campaign theme, as the district's graduation rate ranks well below the California state average. A new superintendent was hired during the first year of implementation and they continue at the district office today.

High Needs Suburban District gave LCFF responsibilities to its already established District Advisory Committee. This committee seats one parent and one student representative from each school site plus their alternates. While a similar approach proved unwieldy for Large Urban District 2, High Needs Suburban District's smaller size made this approach more manageable. On one hand, it was efficient to build on a pre-established representative body to accomplish some of the key community engagement requirements of the LCFF. On the other hand, this approach lost some of the excitement of the newness of the LCFF that motivated other districts to be ambitious in its outreach.

At an LCFF town hall meeting early in the implementation phase, about a dozen parents gathered in the library of one of the high schools to hear a presentation from a senior administrator about how the new law is intended to work. After about an hour of flipping through PowerPoint slides in the darkened room, parents were given the opportunity to voice their preferences for new initiatives. One parent commented on how it was difficult for her high schooler to get into see a guidance counselor. Another parent,

speaking through a translator, said that her child needed more help learning English. The superintendent, who was present, responded to some of the parents' comments. Each response by the superintendent gave validation to the parent's concern or proposal. Several times the superintendent explained a district initiative similar or identical to the request that was already underway. Parents seemed to be satisfied by the responses they received.

High Needs Suburban District was less transparent with the raw data it collected from the community than the other three districts, but the administration gave the board regular reports on how parent input was shaping the district's LCAP priorities. A district administrator compiled community input, coded the responses, and derived four categories in which most of the input could fit. These are: a welcoming environment, communication, supporting student success, and empowerment.

Categorized under the welcoming environment category are district initiatives such as, a daily greeting for parents from parent liaisons. Communication initiatives focused on expanding the district's capacity to reach the community – particularly parents – and keep them informed. Although listed third, the supporting student success category had the most initiatives, which were wide-ranging. Supporting student success strategies stretched from promoting student health to reforming discipline practices to early literacy workshops. The initiatives in the fourth objective, empowerment, were vague, but intended to provide tools for parents to be involved in their children's education.

Board members were complimentary of the work the administration had done to listen to the community and emphasized the importance of continuing to do so. Several

board members told anecdotal stories of their constituents conveying their pleasant surprise with how fast ideas that were expressed at LCFF forums were acted on by the administration.

Although the board was kept informed with frequent reports, High Needs Suburban District's LCAP was written in a way that made it difficult to trace its funding commitments with the input it received from its community, but upon careful study, the plan does seem to be reflective of community preferences. Dual immersion stands out as a common ask at community forums. As dual immersion is a technical strategy that the lay public would be unlikely to know about, it could be at first puzzling why this was high on the public mind. The reason seems to be that the district had already established a dual emersion program at select schools that were well received by students and parents. Praise for the program organically spread throughout community networks.

Conclusion. High Needs Suburban District's name aptly describes its environment. Although located near tremendous wealth, most students served by High Needs Suburban District are eligible for the National School Lunch Program. Although the community of High Needs Suburban District may not be wealthy, it is close-knit and supportive of the district, even though the district performs well below the state average. There is no interest group presence to speak of, but the school board and senior administration is in tune to the community and although not always in agreement, the community usually gives the district governing team the benefit of the doubt.

Chapter Seven: A Cautiously Optimistic Start to the LCFF

This chapter explores LCFF implementation efforts at the local level. I describe broad themes that I observed across four school districts in Northern California: optimism about the new law among implementers; difficulty operationalizing the LCAP; increased engagement opportunities; few new players coming to the table; and the need to increase district leaders' capabilities to include stakeholders in the governing process as well as increase stakeholder's capabilities to meaningfully engage and make their voices heard.

As stated in Chapter One, I conducted qualitative interviews with members of the school board, senior district administrators who have a hand in engaging the community and writing the LCAP, and community leaders. Table 7.1 disaggregates the categories of my respondents at the district level. Six of my interviewees who I categorized in the advocate category were also counted in the civil rights category in Table 1.1 because in addition to being active in local districts, they also have influence at the state level.

Table 7.1: Identities of Local Interviewees

Identity	N
Board member	8
District administrator	7
Advocate	9

Forty-eight meeting attendees were asked to complete my survey over the course of nine public meetings, and I collected forty-three responses across the four districts. The size of the meeting drove my requests to potential informants. I made a personal verbal

request to as many participants as I could politely reach without being disruptive.[28] At some meetings, I could talk with every person in attendance, but when there were large turnouts it was not possible to ask each attendee.[29]

Survey participants were asked to describe themselves as a parent, district staff, community leader, interested citizen, or member of an advocacy group. Several respondents checked multiple boxes and so they are counted multiple times in Table 7.2. For example, a teacher with children identified themselves as both a district staff member and a parent, and so they were counted twice. Respondents identifying as having multiple roles adds extra context to the data. On one hand, it presents an extra data point to show that some meeting attendees wear multiple hats and play distinctly different roles in the district. On the other hand, recording multiple identities blurs analysis of how one identity responded to a question as compared to others. The table below shows the distribution by identity of meeting participants.

[28] One potential respondent politely declined as they were preparing to give a public comment. Another declined because they did not feel like they were able to adequately answer the prompts in English. Two potential respondents expressed interest in completing the survey, but communicated that they did not want to take the time during the meeting and would email their response to me afterwards. Both surveys were not returned. Only one person that I approached declined without reason.

[29] I explained my affiliation as a graduate student and told them that their response would be helpful to my research. A short paragraph at the top of the survey summarized its purpose.

Table 7.2: District Meeting Participant Identity

Role	N
Parent	11
District staff	21
Community leader	8
Interested citizen	8
Member of an advocacy group	9

My survey tool also served as a helpful icebreaker to talk to meeting attendees about their experience participating in school district meetings and governance. Sometimes I would generate the conversation, but about as often the survey respondents were eager to give me a piece of information that they thought would be useful to my research or expand on their written responses. These conversations were not systematic, but provided many helpful data points for understanding the community and school district culture. I did my best to capture the extra information when finishing my notes at the end of my observations at district events.

In addition to interviews, survey tools, and observations, I traced my case study districts' processes for incorporating community input in a couple of ways. All four districts were transparent about how they captured input from the community and what they captured. Three of my four case study districts posted notes from community meetings on their LCFF webpages. In their LCAPs, all districts described how they engaged their communities and the impact that it had on the plans. In addition to these data, I drew on

my listening at LCFF related meetings, reports to the boards on LCFF engagement, and personal interviews.

Adopting to the New Paradigm

My informants at the district level reported mostly optimism – albeit cautious – for the LCFF. A version of the phrase, "This is very exciting!" came up again and again in interview after interview. Education researcher Michael Fullan (2015) called the LCFF "California's golden opportunity." This is because in Fullan's eyes, the LCAP has the potential to "bring about substantial transformation that mobilizes districts, regions and the state to bring about real system transformation that has widespread benefit for all students in the state" (p. 2).

Even before the State Board of Education completed the rulemaking process, my four districts got to work planning their engagement strategies once Governor Brown signed the LCFF into law, as did advocacy groups. A cottage industry of LCFF information sessions popped up across the state. Management groups, such as the CSBA and the ACSA hosted workshops for their members; the CTA strategized with their local affiliates; and civil rights groups worked to inform parents about their new powers.

Equity was the great unifier of the LCFF, while the local control aspect of the new law was always a point of contention with the civil rights groups and their concerns lasted into implementation. Somewhat surprisingly, district officials were also nervous about their newfound freedom. They may have been glad to see the old system of categorical funding

go, but district administrators felt the scars of the punitive threats of the accountability era and did not fully trust that a new era was dawning.

Californians' willingness to more equitably redistribute funding for education is notable. Not only did voters overwhelmingly approve Proposition 30, the initiative described in an earlier chapter that imposed more taxes on high income earners to better fund education, but polling also shows strong support for the LCFF. Seventy-one percent of Californians who were surveyed in 2013, the year the LCFF was enacted, were in favor of giving more money to schools that serve large populations of students from low-income families and English learners (Baldassare et al., 2014).

The shift to local control created an environment that was new to districts and their communities. Although they long decried the old system of categorical funding, districts obtaining the autonomy from Sacramento that they had long asked for may be akin to the dog catching up to the wheel. The shift of power created an enormous need to enhance district capabilities for hearing community requests. There was no longer a higher power to which to shift blame.

The requirement to intensely involve the community in budget and planning decisions also created some nervousness among district officials. The community engagement expectation was not because districts did not want to do it, but because, as several of my informants reported, they realized that robust community engagement would require learning. A board member reported to me:

> I know our staff did something like 50 meetings, but you know it is not the number of meetings, but the process you follow in the meetings that creates authenticity as

far as the results and the input. You saw that at the meeting you were at didn't you. Not a lot of people there…preaching to the choir. The outreach was nominal.

My respondents from across the four districts acknowledged that a paradigm shift was necessary to go beyond what they were doing before the LCFF to comply with the mandates of the new law and respond to the pressure of expectations from Sacramento to robustly engage the community and be transparent in their planning and budgeting.

Although there was anxiety in all four districts, there was also grand hope for what could be achieved with the new framework. One board member told me, "My dream is that every member of the community will come to the board meeting and say, 'We just really want to say thank you for holding true to your promise, for actually holding engagement sessions that matter, for going deep on the issues that matter for us.'" The LCFF gave districts a needed nudge to begin to create the capacity and learn necessary skills for more robustly engaging their communities.

The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, but not unanimous. A board member who also once headed a prominent civil rights group, was opposed to the new liberty districts were granted under the principle of local control. In our conversation she said, "In my opinion, It really is a big abdication of the state still having some willingness to accept what its responsibility is to ensure comparability across the state for every child." This perspective harkens back to the 2013 debate in front of the State Board of Education about effective accountability mechanisms to ensure equity across high-needs school districts and their better-off counterparts.

On paper, districts made good on their new responsibility to engage their communities and incorporate their input into their governing decisions. One board member understood the LCFF's concept of community engagement as "the promise that we are going to do this together." Although district LCAPs largely mirrored community desires, my observations and interactions with district officials and stakeholders made clear that the ability of districts to implement projects varies, as does stakeholders' opinion of how well implementation is being handled. Making members of the community feel heard requires districts not just saying they will do what the community wants, but actually doing it and doing it well. Equally important is including community members in the implementation process so that they understand what it takes to implement new programs and can give feedback in real time. Well executed plans are unlikely to succeed if stakeholders are not aware of or do not understand what is happening and why it is happening.

The Local Control and Accountability Plan

As the LCAP is the key LCFF planning and budgeting document for districts, the document is by far the most widely-scrutinized part of implementation. Here I consider how my case study districts engaged their communities as stated in their LCAP, reported by informants, and in my own observations. It is near universal that the template is not serving one of its intended purposes of being a transparent document for community consumption. Given the complexity of governing school districts, this was a difficult goal to attain.

I read through each of my case study districts' LCAPs for the first year of implementation in 2014-2015 through the 2016-2017 year, which makes three LCAPs for each district and several thousands of pages. I read through each plan to pull relevant information and assess each document according to qualities and actions that are relevant to community engagement.

Plain and simple, the LCAP proved to be a bureaucratic document that is full of jargon, such as referencing state statute and assigning hard to understand numeric codes that correspond to the budgeting process. These practices make the document hard to read for anyone not intimately familiar with evaluating the state education code or large school district budgets. Therefore, when districts' LCAPs reflect community preferences, it may not be obvious. It is widely agreed that most districts across the state need to do a better job of making their LCAPs more accessible, yet this advice needs to be balanced with the recognition that governing a district with multiple school sites and tens of thousands of students is complex.

Making meaning of the LCAP was a struggle for districts across the state and echoes civil rights group leader Arun Ramanathan's (2015) warning that combining parent engagement, strategic planning, and financial accountability would leave all three individually wanting. Humphrey and Koppich (2014) wrote, "Several districts expressed confusion or ambivalence about the scope and purpose of the LCAP. They struggled to determine whether the LCAP was most essentially…a compliance document – or an articulation of the district's overall fiscal strategy for meeting its academic goals" (p. 6). A superintendent who I spoke with indicated a similar struggle. She stated, "I think we have

to be more explicit that the challenge is that the LCAP template is really messy. I mean it is a beast!...How do I do that and translate it to something that is community friendly."

The template was such that some districts felt constrained by space, although there were no actual limitations, and wrote in a way that sacrificed readability. One district reduced common terms, such as African Americans, dual immersion, depth of knowledge, and education code, to very uncommon acronyms, such as AA, DI, DOK, and EC respectively. Although a glossary was included that explained the terms, this is one of many examples of the lack of readability that practitioners and consumers bemoaned.

The design of the LCAP template, both in its first form and later form, put community engagement up front in the first section. Here districts list who they engaged, sometimes how they were engaged, and the impact that this engagement had on the document. Given that all districts throughout the state were confined to the same template, many similarities across districts are to be expected. While there is some resemblance, the local flavor of each of my case study districts still shines through – especially as implementation continues across school years.

One similarity is the difficulty of retaining high-level school district administrators and the governing challenges that administrative turnover creates (Conley & Cooper, 2010). During the time that the first LCAP was adopted by the State Board in June of 2014 and the most current adoption in June of 2016, each of my four districts experienced the departure of a superintendent and the hiring of a new one. In addition to superintendents, other senior administrators also departed. It is unclear what effect this had on the plan going forward, but it is an issue that the civil rights groups are aware of and concerned

about. According to one civil rights group leader who I spoke with, “New people come in sometimes each year – how do you find the history…if you are a student you are screwed.”

Another obvious similarity among districts is the growing length of their plans. They grew significantly, especially from the first year to the second. On average, the length of my districts’ plans grew over 250 percent from the first year to the second and by an average of more than forty percent from the second year to the third year. The four districts averaged about forty pages in the first year and grew to an average of about 200 pages in the third year for about a 400 percent increase. The growth of the districts’ plans is detailed in Table 7.3.

Table 7.3: LCAP Length and Growth

	Approx. pages of 1st LCAP	Percentage increase in year 2	Total percentage increase from year 1 to year 3
Large Urban District 1	80	380%	675%
Large Urban District 2	20	150%	250%
Affluent Suburban District	30	270%	450%
High-Needs Suburban District	25	200%	270%

Although the largest district in the sample did have the largest LCAP, otherwise the size of the student population did not necessarily correlate with the size of the plan. On one hand, it makes sense that plans should grow year after year, as updating a plan to report progress and additional engagement, as well as add new goals, will naturally increase length. On the other hand, the large percentage by which the plans grew is

alarming given that the feedback from districts and criticism from civil rights groups after the first year was to reduce the complexity and improve the readability of the LCAP (Humphrey & Koppich, 2014; Fullan, 2015).

Another reason for the increased length of the LCAP was the change in the template that was a result of feedback about creating a more readable document. The new template took a simpler form that gave districts more room to tell their goals, versus filling in numerous boxes. The second-year template also coupled the budget to goals more tightly than the first version.

If You Build It Will They Come? How Do You Build It?

All four districts made clear in their LCAPs that the LCFF inspired an extraordinary amount of outreach to specific stakeholder groups and the community at large. Several informants saw the LCFF as a spark to get extra aggressive in involving the community. I heard from a board member, "You have to meet the minimum but we have decided to go beyond that. And so we just threw out the net and then we had such great interest from stakeholders that wanted to work with us." Their remark speaks to the hortatory power embedded within the LCFF.

Two out of the four districts listed precise meeting dates and their purpose in the first section of the LCAP. When more exact information was not included in a district's LCAP, it could generally be found on its webpage. All four districts have a dedicated place on their site for the LCFF and LCAP. Two of the four districts have a link to this section on the homepage. Each of the four districts give a simple overview of the LCFF and the LCAP

and links to more resources if visitors care to learn more. Three of the four districts also use this page as a place to archive all their LCFF work, including past meeting schedules, agendas, and community feedback.

It was assumed that each district would post their LCAP on their webpage, as this was a requirement of the new law. However, all four districts went well beyond this requirement and created a dedicated page to display LCFF and LCAP information and documents. Three of the districts had a link to the LCFF page directly on their homepage. This action not only made the districts' LCFF efforts easier to follow for the interested citizen, but might also have captured the attention of a curious parent who was on the webpage for other business and therefore widened the outreach impact.

The one district that did not link the LCFF page to the homepage was Affluent Suburban District, which is the district with the least to gain from the new funding formula. Not only is Affluent Suburban District's LCFF page not linked to the homepage, but it is also difficult to find, as it is on the department's page that is driving LCAP planning and this is information that the common citizen would be unlikely to know. However, once visitors do make it to Affluent Suburban District's LCFF page, they will find a well organized archive of all previous meeting agendas and handouts. Urban District 1 and 2 also use their LCFF page as an archive, while High Needs Suburban District tends to only use their page to display its LCAP and make announcements about upcoming LCFF related meetings.

Although the districts' webpages do contain helpful information for citizens who want to engage with the process, careful maintenance of the resources will be critical to keeping transparency and making engagement opportunities accessible. On a few

occasions, important website links, such as, “How to get more involved in LCAP,” were broken.

No explicit requirements were given to districts on the tools they should use to engage their communities other than that they should form an LCAP advisory committee (and English learner advisory committee if the districts serves more than fifteen percent English learners) and post their LCAPs on their websites for public consumption. Especially in a state as big and diverse as California, implementation of the new law is sure to be understood and implemented differently at the local level (McLaughlin, 1990; Spillane et al., 2002). This proved true in my districts and can be seen when using similar engagement tools and strategies as well as ones that are different.

Even with little guidance from the state, there were similarities across the four districts, which reflects accepted best practices and learning from professional networks (Mintrom & Vergari, 1998; Balla, 2001). Three big tools and strategies for engagement that were consistent across the four districts are displayed in Table 7.4. Although similar engagement tools were selected, their use varied across districts. The effect of each tool is a complex equation of the talents and skill sets of the people in the district, the capability of a community, and pre-existing community culture.

Table 7.4: Outreach Strategies Consistent Across all Four Districts:

- Dedicated place for the LCFF and LCAP on the district webpage
- Held numerous town hall style meetings that were open to the community at large
- Dedicated time and space for LCFF feedback in pre-existing committees and structures

All districts embarked on extensive outreach that emphasized in-person listening sessions with stakeholders. High-Needs Suburban District stated that it held 50 unique opportunities to give input and Large Urban District 1 reported reaching over 5,000 stakeholders. All districts included special meetings with their classified employees and teachers. All districts also scheduled meeting opportunities that were explicit for students and parents. A common trend for districts was to shoehorn LCFF input into existing structures. For example, a district solicited LCFF feedback from a committee that was working on implementing the Common Core State Standards. Another district involved its school site councils. Several districts employed online surveys and made a portal to capture comments on the website.

"Meetings upon meetings," was how a senior administrator described their LCFF outreach process to me – and not with a negative tone. Large Urban District 1 claimed over 100 unique outreach opportunities in the first year of LCFF implementation. Even Affluent Suburban District, which is almost a quarter the size of Large Urban District 1 and financially benefits very little from the LCFF's funding structure, reported making over a dozen outreach opportunities available.

As described earlier in the chapter, circulating a survey at public meetings became an efficient way for me to collect data about attendees' feelings towards the district, issues that were on their mind, and who they were. More than a few times I was surprised when reviewing the completed surveys at the end of a meeting by who was present. While getting to know the players in each district, I learned from the survey that my visual assessment of who was in attendance often had been inaccurate. What looked to be a

reasonable turnout of the public for a board meeting was sometimes mostly district employees who were compelled to be there for their professional responsibilities.

On several occasions, be it a regularly scheduled weeknight board meeting or a special weekend public forum, I felt a jolt of excitement when pulling into a packed school parking lot. This feeling was short lived when it was clear that the cars drove people to attend a sporting event, and I had my pick of empty chairs in the governance meeting. Once I showed up to a dark building because the meeting that I put on my calendar the week before had been rescheduled and I had not checked the website before making the journey to the district to confirm that the meeting was going ahead as planned.

My survey showed the attendance of parents to vary across the four districts. Although the small sample size makes this information difficult to interpret, it is strengthened through my interviews and personal observations. Large Urban District 1 saw the most participation by parents and High Needs Suburban District also saw substantial attendance. At first glance it should not surprise that Large Urban District 1 had the most parent participation, as it is the largest district. However, Large Urban District 2 is also one of the largest school districts in California and the parent participation was the lowest. High Needs Suburban District serves the smallest number of students in my study and experienced high participation.

District outreach efforts were certainly a factor in the identity of the people present and my observation opportunities. A simple explanation as to why I found more parents participating in Large Urban District 1 and High Needs Suburban District versus Large Urban

District 2 and Affluent Suburban District is because they were asked more often (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Rosenstone & Hansen, 2003).

There has always been concern about governing districts according to the preferences of a small, but loud and eager group of parents and community members who regularly engage with district leaders (Fiorina, 1999). Engaging new members of the public is not something that has regularly been tracked, but anecdotally a skepticism prevails that district engagement must be more robust. When considering its district's engagement efforts around the LCFF a board member who I was interviewing mused, "For ease of staff they go to places like site council meetings, but you are only getting a skewed slice of your public that way."

Another board member, who was a longtime teacher and administrator before being elected to the board after retirement, implied in our interview that districts often hold meetings in order to check a box that they engaged the community. According to her, the board has an important responsibility to hold the district accountable for more authentic and robust engagement. She stated:

> Unless we as a board ask how many people were at a meeting, that doesn't come back to us. Educators traditionally, and I include myself in this, the goal was to do something or to offer something, not looking at did it result in something and make a difference…There is no assessment. Unless we ask the question, the mindset culturally of our education system is to do things and to offer them, but not to look at the productivity part. Did it make a difference?

The board member's reflection could be directed to an input-output model where instead of holding a meeting and seeing what happens, the design process is reversed to consider the outputs that need to be achieved and then designing a meeting and recruiting participants accordingly.

Partly because of demand from the community and partly because of the ambition of district leaders, Large Urban District 1 has implemented robust outreach efforts, such as regular public forums with the superintendent. In High Needs Suburban District the school board and superintendent often organized their meetings to include community participation, such as performances from cheerleading squads or awards. Although they did not stay throughout the entire meeting, this practice prompted many parents to attend. Given that parents are the primary direct consumer of school district services – at least on the surface – it is somewhat surprising that more were not regularly in attendance across the four districts.

A larger data set provided by Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) and the University of Southern California (USC) adds perspective to the data from my districts. In the PACE/USC's 2016 statewide survey, only sixteen percent of respondents had either heard or read a little or a lot about the LCFF. The districts in my study undertook ambitious community engagement efforts, especially compared to before the LCFF was enacted. Yet, a large survey sample shows that communities across California are little aware of the LCFF and the opportunities the law has inspired for them to engage. In a 2014 survey by the PPIC, only twenty-seven percent of respondents reported being very or somewhat knowledgeable about the LCFF (Baldassare, et al., 2014).

After witnessing what seemed to be aggressive outreach efforts of four district administrations, it is surprising to find that so few people statewide reported any contacts from their district. When respondents of the PACE/USC statewide survey were asked, "Have you been invited to or made aware of meetings or events related to setting goals, providing input into spending, reviewing the progress being made in your local public schools, and/or developing a Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP)," eighty-eight percent reported that they had not been. Only eleven percent reported that they were invited to give input. Six percent declined the invitation and five percent accepted. Of the five percent who did give input, fifty-nine percent reported that they felt that their input was taken into account when the district compiled its plan.

At the same time, citizens reported in the statewide poll that they are interested in giving input. When asked, "How interested would you be in participating in setting goals for and reviewing the progress made by your local public school in the future," sixty-two percent reported that they would either be very or somewhat interested. The numbers remained consistent when the poll got more specific about the types of input citizens wished to give. When asked "How interested would you be in participating in deciding how to allocate resources to advance the goals of your local public school in the future," sixty-seven percent reported that they were either very or somewhat interested. When asked, "How interested would you be in participating in setting goals for and reviewing the progress made by your local school district in the future," sixty-four percent of respondents reported that they would be very or somewhat interested.

The interactions I had with the survey respondents in my study varied and contributed to my observations about the four districts' engagement culture. Some people chose to quickly fill out the survey and returned it with few comments. Others showed keen interest in my project and offered insights outside the scope of the survey or expanded on the answers they gave.

As I stated earlier, the survey was revealing for who appeared to be in the room versus who actually was in the room. Filing seats does not make community engagement a given. The survey also captured differing opinions across meeting participants that otherwise would have been unlikely to surface. Citizens have different levels of political information and exposure and they are unique in how they receive and accept information to form opinions (Zaller, 1992).

Sitting only a few seats away from each other, one survey respondent called the school board and superintendent very responsive, while the other found the district to be unresponsive. The first respondent wrote:

> I have a great deal of respect for the board and district staff and their approach to all the issues. In these forums they are providing the background and data that drive their decisions - too often the info that explains the decision is not available and well intentioned parents make assumptions and become angry - the issues are complex and the solutions are not always clear until you see the whole picture. I think the more people know and see the data on issues (i.e. the common enrolment issue) the more they would support the direction and plans.

The other meeting attendee wrote:

> The school district needs a lot of help when it comes to making changes to benefit students' education. I attend meetings but most of the time things really don't change. Those in high positions are really not knowledgeable and able to make changes for the district.

As she stated, the first respondent is understanding of the complexity of running a large school district and the second respondent feels that senior administrators are not competent in their work. Although the small sample size of survey respondents in the four districts prevents drawing firm causal conclusions about how typical the degree of variance in the two respondents' responses may be, along with qualitative observation, these survey responses show how widely different two participants of the same meeting can view a district's responsiveness.

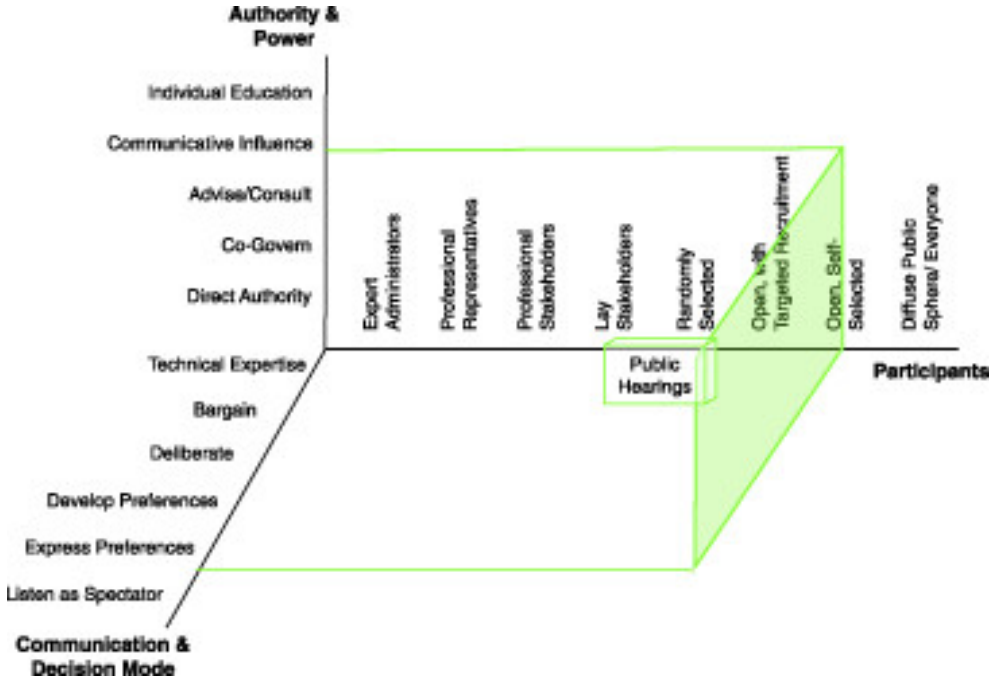
When reaching out to stakeholders and implementing the LCFF, district administrators face the challenge of making stakeholders feel a part of the process and not that they are merely presenting pre-determined plans. One respondent lamented, "As you saw tonight, much of the decision making is predetermined and 'engagement' is an after thought." In a similar vein, another informant felt that the public's input was taken only after struggle. He stated, "Decisions frequently appear to be made by the superintendent and staff and ratified by the school board. Occasionally community and employee groups object strenuously enough to change, deflect, or delay those decisions."

Choosing and Setting the Stage for Engagement and Participation

While having the liberty to engage communities in a way that fits the local flavor was refreshing, it was also somewhat problematic for districts responding to a new mandate, as there is no one right way for how community engagement should look or feel. It is therefore important to contemplate different possibilities for how, when, and why citizens participate in school district governing decisions and its impact. Fung (2006) developed a framework to consider what he saw as a range of possibilities along three dimensions of participation. They are: "Who participates, how participants communicate with one another and make decisions together, and how discussions are linked with policy or public action" (p. 66).

Fung organized participant selection, communication and decision, and authority and power in a graphic display, which he termed the "democracy cube." In agreement with findings from the ASPA Civic Engagement Task Force (2005), Fung showed that participation serves three important democratic values: legitimacy, justice, and the effectiveness of public action. The Cube is replicated below:

Figure 7.1: Fung's Democracy Cube



Source: Fung, A. (2015). Putting the public back into governance: The challenges of citizen participation and its future. *Public Administration Review*, *75*(4), 513-522.

The democracy cube presents a spectrum of possibilities for each dimension of participation. On one end of the participant spectrum are those who self-select to take part in the governance process. An example of this would be showing up to a school board meeting. School board meetings are required to be public meetings and thus open to all. Continuing along the spectrum, participants might be selectively recruited, which is a strong possibility when explaining which parents engage in LCFF work; lay stakeholders, who are unpaid citizens with an interest in serving, e.g., official LCFF committee members; or expert administrators, e.g., district employees tasked with writing official budgets and plans.

Participation. My case study districts utilized a variety of ways for their communities to participate. Large Urban District 1 created the most opportunities for open participation for all who were interested in weighing in on the LCFF. Affluent Suburban District held the least number of open meetings and the other two districts were somewhere in between. Although I did not collect such information, past research suggests that individuals who are wealthier and better educated, as well as interested in education governance, would be most likely to take advantage of open calls for participation (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Fiorina, 1999).

According to Fung, districts can avoid falling into the trap of only hearing from a few diehard LCFF enthusiasts by selectively recruiting participants from subgroups that are traditionally less likely to engage. Here community organizations can be especially helpful in informing and mobilizing low-income and minority communities. Large Urban District 1 had the advantage here, as its community already had a strong infrastructure of community organizations. Although often adversarial, many community groups maintain a close working relationship with Large Urban District 1. The district took the unique step of involving community groups in planning its LCFF engagement strategy. Large Urban District 1 brought community groups together in a pre-engagement meeting to ask them how they wanted to be engaged and to ask for advice on how the engagement should be carried out.

Large Urban District 2 is also home to a wide variety of community organizations, but whereas Large Urban District 1 typically calls on its groups for assistance, the instincts of Large Urban District 2's administration has been to keep the groups at arm's length.

When groups in Large Urban District 2 began organizing and educating parents on the new law they were initially met with hostility by the superintendent.

Affluent Suburban District and High Needs Suburban District are both largely without groups that have the capacity to mobilize traditionally marginalized populations. While Affluent Suburban District's general outreach to its minority communities was sparse, it was far above what it had done in the past. High Needs Suburban District did not have the advantage of community groups to mobilize participants, but the administration made a commendable effort to hear a wide array of voices by engaging church groups.

As was required by the new law, all four districts utilized lay stakeholders as participants in the process by way of LCFF advisory committees and English learner advisory committees (in three of the four districts). The success of the committees varied across districts. This was dependent on the design and facilitation of the committees and the communication that occurred as a result.

Communication. The communication and decision dimension of Fung's cube considers how participants interact with each other and reach a conclusion – if any. There are six modes of communication, beginning with the least intense and progressing to the most intense.

The least intense form is simply showing up and listening as a spectator. This would be a good deal of people who attend school board meetings. If they speak during a designated time for public comment they would move along the dimension to expressing their preferences. Next is aggregation and bargaining, which assumes that participants

know what they want and angle during the meeting to achieve decisions that are closest to their preferences. More intense than aggregation and bargaining is deliberation and negotiation, which is considered by some political theorists to be the ideal of democracy (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Mansbridge, 2010). When deliberation occurs, participants take time to "absorb educational background materials and exchange perspectives, experiences, and reasons with one another to develop their views and discover their interests" (Fung, 2006, p. 69). The most intense form of communication and decision is technical expertise. That happens when policy is determined by officials who possess professional specialization that is appropriate for solving the problem at hand.

The most common mode of communication I observed participants utilizing across all four districts was listening as spectators or expressing their preferences. This is unsurprising, as these two modes have the least cost to entry. They are also the easiest for districts to facilitate.

When observing meetings that were not official board meetings but were open to the public, I took note of how much time was being spent on presentations from district officials versus how much time was allocated for discussion or small group work. My timekeeping was not exact, but presents a reasonable picture of how district officials and citizens spend their time together during community meetings or forums. These data is recorded in Table 7.5.

Across the four districts, an average of seventy-six percent of the time was spent by district officials relaying information to attendees. As can be seen in Table 7.5, on average,

the remaining time was spent in discussion, receiving input from attendees, or working in small groups.

Table 7.5: Listening Versus Informing

	Informing	Listening
Large Urban District 1	69%	31%
Large Urban District 2	70%	30%
Affluent Suburban District	80%	20%
High Needs Suburban District	85%	15%
Average	76%	24%

The ratio of time spent informing versus listening was contextually dependent on the local community. Meeting participants in Large Urban District 1 expected to give their input regularly. Participants in Affluent Suburban District seemed more content to receive information from the district. Here the district's strong track record of student success sometimes dictated discussion. A meeting participant in Affluent Suburban District might ask a clarifying question about information that had just been presented. On several occasions the question was brushed off with a comment, such as, "we don't really need to worry about that because our district is so much farther ahead than others."

I saw deliberative qualities to the LCFF advisory committee meetings across all four districts. These were meetings of lay citizens who had made substantial commitments to advise their districts in the LCFF process. Largely absent from the LCFF process was bargaining, which is a common tool of interest groups. Because the bargaining mentality

was absent in public meetings does not mean that it was not happening behind the scenes and in different venues. It is likely that interests were strategic about leveraging venues where they had the most authority, such as the collective bargaining process.

Authority. The Authority and power dimension gauges the impact of public participation. On one end of the spectrum is direct authority, which might resemble something of the New England-style town hall. On the other end of the spectrum, and the one Fung suggests is descriptive of most participatory venues, is when citizens have no strong expectation of influence, but join for the personal edification of participating. A rung up from personal benefit is having a communicative influence, such as affecting the decision of school board members by giving a public comment. Next on the dimension – and most in line with the expectations of the LCFF – is advice and consultation. According to Fung, in this mode, officials preserve their authority and power but commit themselves to receiving input from participants.

Whereas the LCFF requires that districts consult their public, the ultimate authority for improving the LCAP rests with school boards. In all four districts I observed, district administrators solicited public input, often with board members present,[30] and then devised the LCAP according to how the administrator interpreted the public's input. In one district I attended a special board meeting that was called specifically to solicit community input on the LCAP. Last on the spectrum, there are two categories for exercising direct

[30] California's Ralph M. Brown Act (1953) prohibits quorums of school boards from meeting without giving proper notice to the public. The law was intended to promote transparency. Boards were careful not to violate the Brown Act by agreeing on which members would attend specific meetings.

power: co-governing and exercising direct authority. I did not witness either co-governing or direct authority, as no school board committed to be bound by community forums or votes. Both citizens co-governing or exercising direct authority seems unlikely in the LCFF process.

A statement by Fung can apply to the challenges and possibility that lay ahead for the LCFF. He wrote, "Citizens can be the shock troops of democracy. Properly deployed, their local knowledge, wisdom, commitment, authority, even rectitude can address wicked failures of legitimacy, justice, and effectiveness in representative and bureaucratic institutions" (p. 74). The success of the LCFF will depend on school districts creating the spaces for citizens to effectively communicate and express their informed preferences. Of course, citizens will also need to show up.

Conclusion

LCFF implementers recognize that building the capacity both for engagement and marrying the planning process to the budget will happen over time. The challenges for combining stakeholder engagement, strategic planning, and financial accountability have been immense, but district officials tend to be optimistic about the impact the new law will have on their students' achievement. Although less buoyant about the new law, civil rights groups have largely been willing to give it a chance and pre-existing groups have been active in their local district's implementation.

In Chapter Three I used Verba, Schlozman, and Brady's (1995) Civic Volunteerism Model and other literature to consider how school district governance is affected by who is

able to participate, who is willing to participate, and who is asked to participate. I return to these questions to conclude this chapter.

All four districts explicitly worked to remove barriers to who is able to participate. Online participation, such as survey instruments removed being physically present as an obstacle for expressing opinions, but makes the possibility of deliberation more difficult. At LCFF town halls, childcare was always available and meeting material and proceedings were always translated into Spanish. Language translation is an area of needed improvement for all four districts. Although eighty-four percent of English learners speak Spanish at home, there are thirty-one other languages spoken by 1,000 or more students across California (Maxwell-Jolly & Buenrostro, 2016). Districts need to assess the number of English learner students who speak a language at home other than Spanish and determine the practicality of providing additional translation services. Beyond language, overcoming socio-economic barriers, such as parents having the know-how to effectively voice their preferences for their children's education, remains a conundrum.

In each district, particularly at school board meetings, there was a dedicated group of frequent – and usually vocal – attendees. Otherwise, few showed up to participate in the LCFF process. Lack of presence implies that citizens did not show up because they were simply uninterested and unwilling, although a statewide survey suggested otherwise. The contradiction of the relatively low turnout of the community in the LCFF process and the survey data indicates that the community needs to be asked to participate in the governing process in more convincing ways. Delivering an ask that effectively moves the community

to participate can be done by building relationships with community groups, creating welcoming cultures, and getting creative.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion and Recommendations

Study Review

This study started with a question about the democratic capacity of school districts. The LCFF put enormous faith in local control and relies on communities to ensure that their school districts are spending and acting both equitably and in line with their preferences. I found that districts rose to the community engagement challenge to respond to both the mandatory and suggestive requirements of the LCFF, yet how they did so sometimes varied. While there was genuine excitement for the new law that was nearly universal upon enactment, challenges emerged that have and will continue to influence the political support and opposition for the LCFF and therefore its sustainability (McDonnell & Weatherford, 2016). Community engagement may be more robust in the LCFF era than before, but new voices are not always at the table and districts continue to develop the skill sets that allow for the parents who do come to the table feel heard.

All four of the districts reported creating more community listening opportunities than they had in past years because of how they understood the requirements of the LCFF. This was because they were wary of consequences from the state if they did not, although what the consequences might have been were ambiguous. Probably more important for creating authentic community engagement opportunities was that most district administrators and board members were enthused about how the LCFF encouraged them to create mechanisms for better including community preferences in the governance of their districts. Increasing state revenue and relaxed regulation were central to LCFF

engagement enthusiasts' optimism because they made it easier for districts to build capacity for community engagement.

The distinguishing factor of how district efforts were perceived by the community came down to the pre-existing culture. The key contributing factors to district culture are the skills that district officials bring to facilitating engagement opportunities and their abilities to make members of the community feel that their opinions are valued, as well as the level and tenor of engagement from the community. The two can be mutually reinforcing, as a community that grows accustomed to efficient meetings and leaves feeling heard is likely to have positive feelings for the district and support district initiatives. Alternatively, if districts appear to be promoting their own agendas rather than listening to the desires of the community, then community members could feel the need to be adversarial rather than supportive.

Whether a district is responsive to its community or not is in the eye of the beholder. Tracing what communities said they wanted strongly resembles what school boards adopted in their LCAPs. Yet, some community members, particularly in Large Urban District 2, loudly questioned districts' motives. The dichotomy of members of the community feeling unheard even though district plans largely mirror preferences expressed at community forums and in surveys may be explained by process. If community members do not feel included or valued in the process, they may not be inclined to give their support.

The LCFF's commitment to equity was especially salient and did not go without mention in any of my conversations across the districts. In addition to equity as a larger

operating principle, informants talked at length about programs and investments that were made possible by the LCFF. Board members and district officials tended to also be enthusiastic about their new found autonomy from the state, but nervousness existed about the state's authenticity in bestowing this new freedom and if the state would standby its pledge to be supportive and not punitive. The local control aspect of the LCFF was never fully embraced by civil rights groups, but these groups were only influential in two of the four case study districts.

Among the most intense challenges districts felt lay in working within the confines of the LCAP template from the State Board. The LCAP template requires that districts record in the document what efforts they make to engage stakeholders and the impact that it has on the final plan. Although guiding questions are offered for how districts might frame their engagement strategy, this did not always translate to implementation excellence – quality varied across districts. In her report on LCAPs for The Education Trust-West, Hahnel (2014) wrote, "Ranging in length from about two dozen to 200 pages, these plans contain a dizzying number of columns, cells, and bits of information – often clouded by jargon and acronyms. Some read as though the district started with a comprehensive plan and then, in an effort to comply, cut it up and reassembled it into the obfuscating LCAP template" (p. 16). Koppich, Humphrey, and Marsh (2015) heard from district officials that the LCAP was "'unwieldy,' 'a nuisance,' 'self-defeating,' and 'a beast of a document'" (p. 5). It became apparent from observing events such as LCAP Advisory Committee meetings or LCFF public forums that skill levels of both facilitators and participants are big reasons for this.

Despite the difficulty of conforming to a new planning and budgeting template, districts reported that they had been much more thoughtful about community engagement than they were prior to the LCFF and the requirements laid out in the LCAP. Reports published by statewide civil rights groups were critical of LCFF implementation, but they were also mostly complimentary about districts' efforts to enhance their community engagement efforts.

Although academic research has been compelling about the benefits for districts of engaging parents and the community (Noguera, 2001; Stone, et al., 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2009), my informants revealed that while they were previously aware of engagement as a positive practice, the LCFF made them more aggressive about jumping into action and being more systematic in their efforts. For example, in the first year of LCFF implementation, all four of my districts were strategic about planning town hall meetings to engage their community, with varying degrees of success.

In an interview, a superintended made a comment that mirrors similar statements from other informants. She said, "For me, I think it makes me be more thoughtful about reaching out to as wide a group as possible and not just giving this – yes we have community engagement – we called for a meeting and set out some tea and cookies and saw who came and did a session. It really deepens it [the engagement]."

In theory, the LCFF provides community stakeholders more opportunity to be assertive about the amount and quality of engagement they expect from their school district. In my observations, these opportunities were seized by groups that were already

active in district politics, such as parents and community groups with pre-existing relationships with the district, and did not inspire new groups to form and mobilize.

Civil rights groups granted the need and expectation under the LCFF for districts to increase their capacity for engagement, but were skeptical if this is a realistic approach. One civil rights group leader told me that he thought this to be "like asking the fox to guard the hen house." According to him, this is because "We are going to take away the stuff that checks on making districts do stuff to empower and trust them and the main stake we are replacing that with is local accountability."

Not one of my interviewees advocated for the LCAP process to continue without some tweaks, but for the most part, only minor ones. The desire to keep continuity in the process, although imperfect, was so that districts could build the capacity to implement LCFF as intended and not merely rush onto a new reform (Humphrey and Koppich, 2014). There was a general understanding, even among civil rights groups, that the LCFF would not be implemented perfectly from the start. Fullan (2015) wrote, "It is not surprising that the first LCAP attempts will be flawed. It is unreal to assume that what is touted as a transformational process could be accomplished and assessed after one year of planning. It is unfair, premature and counterproductive to deem the first plans in low performing districts a failure" (p. 2).

Like Fullan, a board president whom I spoke with viewed the implementation of the new law as a learning process that would be ongoing. The board president reflected, "Whatever we do this first year is not going to be good enough, we already know that going in, but what is going to be good enough is we're going to start our line of

communication between parents, students and families and it is going to get better and better." Learning and building capacity incrementally was a theme among most other informants as well.

Implications for Future Research

This study considered the origins of how the LCFF was enacted at the state capital and followed the law to four Northern California school districts to investigate its implementation. Choosing my case study districts based on variation in the student populations, such as family income and English speaking ability allowed me to form a sample that could be compared in both most similar and most different fashions. Replicating this study with a larger sample would be a natural next step.

I observed differences between how districts that serve mostly students from low-income families engage their communities and a district that serves mostly students from affluent families. This line of inquiry could be expanded by adding more affluent districts to the sample. Due to my capacity as a lone researcher, I was only able to include one affluent district. In the district that I studied, there was a high-level of pride in the school district, which was often due to its schools' test scores being well above the state average and an award winning marching band. Adding additional affluent districts to the sample would add context to the relationship between school performance, community engagement opportunities, and pre-existing culture.

No small districts were included in my sample and doing so would be fertile ground for future research, particularly because about forty percent of California school districts

serve fewer than 1,000 students. The more people who are included, the more difficult deliberation becomes (Dahl, 1989; Fung 2006). As my sample was all large districts, perhaps attaining a deliberative setting was more difficult for them than it would be in smaller districts. Replicating this study in smaller districts could provide the answer.

In adding to the sample size, it would also be useful to hone in on the impact of political activism within communities on the governance of school districts by studying more districts in communities with high activism. In one of my districts I observed positive effects of being in a community with high political involvement. In another district, high community involvement was a cause of frayed relationships. More data points on the impact of activism on district governance could contribute to findings that are instructive for district governing teams.

My research relied heavily on sources from within the districts and observation. It could be illuminating to focus on a more bottom up approach to get a fuller picture of how communities perceive districts' efforts to engage them. My survey instrument was a start, but statistically significant conclusions cannot be drawn from my small sample size. The small sample size was a conundrum for this project, as my potential sample size was limited by the number of attendees at the meetings I attended. The number of people surveyed could be increased by attending more meetings over time and expanding the study to other districts – or better yet conducting a sample survey of districts' communities. Additionally, adding questions that collect demographic information on informants would be helpful for contributing to the literature on who participates in the governance process.

When considering my research questions of how different types of districts responded to new community engagement requirements and what factors explain variations in their responses, I found answers in three places. How districts engage the community depends on the ability of district administrators, the presence of community groups, their ability to mobilize supporters, and the tenor in which they do so. Third is the pre-existing culture in the district, which the previous two findings contribute to. The previous suggestions I gave for expanding the study sample size would make my findings more robust, as would more observations of the actions of district administrators and community group leaders and members, and how specific actions affect each other.

The Gates Foundation's Measuring Teacher Effectiveness (MET) Project provides a compelling framework for better understanding the effectiveness of the actions of the LCFF players. The MET project was devised to be able to help teachers improve their practice through evaluation. Key research questions of the project were what does good teaching look like and how can teachers and administrators pinpoint what works in the classroom. MET researchers video tapped thousands of hours of instruction and performed a content analysis on how students responded. Although ambitious, a similar undertaking aimed at the players of district community engagement could be instructive for future administrator training and community engagement design.

In sum, this dissertation embedded my empirical analysis of four Northern California school districts responding to new community engagement requirements and expectations in several established theoretical frameworks. My findings will be strengthened, contradicted, or amended by expanding the sample size, analyzing what

makes engagement effective, and pinpointing the actions that lead there. Doing so has obvious implications for school districts, but other public administrators and local governments could benefit too, as they practice similar duties.

Policy Recommendations

From the conclusions of my study, I offer recommendations to both policymakers and practitioners on actions that would cast the community engagement net more broadly and effectively. Doing so would improve implementation of the LCFF and increase the democratic nature of governing school districts.

Embrace the complexity of school district governance. At first this recommendation may seem counterintuitive, as district administrators and community group leaders alike decried the complicated nature of the LCAP. However, the LCAP embodies the realities of the complexity of governing large, democratic, and multifaceted institutions such as school districts. Policymakers' aim in establishing the LCAP requirement was to push districts to be transparent about their planning and budgeting processes, which the LCAP succeeded in doing.

The common wisdom is that LCAPs should be simplified and made to be more readable. Readability should always be a district's goal for reports it produces, but simplifying the LCAP risks rendering it less meaningful if it trades transparency. In addition to responding to the LCAP template, districts should produce a guide for parents that describes their high level LCFF priorities and strategies. Additionally, districts can lean more

heavily on community groups to translate the LCAP for their members. This leads to the next recommendation.

Embrace community groups. Education politics can be a raucous affair and both district governing teams and community groups often see their relationships as necessarily adversarial. Community groups is a broad term that can vary across districts.[31] When it comes to working with community groups, some districts naturally put up their protective guard as confrontation can be uncomfortable and raising issues around student achievement, graduation rates, and other measures of district performance can be embarrassing to district governing teams. Although adversarial relationships can be naturally tense, like in the legal field, they can also be productive. By embracing the sometimes necessary tension that is a part of decision making, districts can transform their relationships with community groups from being adversarial to one of partnership.

In the districts I studied that had a lot of activism from community groups, the community groups' mentality was typically that the district was not taking action to address their concerns and the district will not take action unless it is demanded. Large Urban District 2 treated community groups as a nuisance to be tolerated, while Large Urban District 1 looked for ways to collaborate with its community groups.

Governing a large school district is too big a job for districts to do alone. My study and statewide surveys from USC/PACE and the PPIC reveal that although they made

[31] In Large Urban District 1 community groups were most often identified as grassroots based organizations that often had a social justice focus. In contrast, community groups were largely absent in High Needs Suburban District.

commendable efforts, districts engaged a minority of their communities and the communities had little understanding of their districts' planning and budgeting decisions. While district governing teams need to improve their communication abilities – and are likely to do so with time – they need help.

Community groups' are ideally suited to offer such assistance, as they have the deep ties to members of the community that districts may not. Also, community groups have different natural skill sets than do school districts. School districts are built to proliferate educational services, while community groups' survival is based on how well they can organize and mobilize their supporters.

Not only can community groups help districts reach more people, but they can also be conduits of information. Translating the complexity of district LCAPs to its members is a valuable role that community groups could play. Having groups external to the district provide such a service might make the process feel more authentic. Conversely, community groups can also articulate and express their members' preferences to districts. By aggregating their members' preferences and concerns, districts are likely to get a more representative picture of their communities' needs versus hearing from a few speakers during public comment at board meetings – although also important.

Embrace communication as a necessary tool in district governing teams' toolboxes. District leaders have a difficult balance to maintain between informing and listening. About half of the meetings I sat in on were designed to collect stakeholder input but were hardly more than PowerPoint presentations that left little room for public

comment or discussion. Given the new law's expectations for public engagement, it seems surprising that some meetings offer little opportunity for the community to be heard. On the other hand, for community engagement to be effective, it is critical that district leaders empower stakeholders with critical information about the new law and the complexity regarding a district's capacity to enhance or implement new programs. Creating a space for authentic engagement requires both informing and listening and it is a time-consuming business. District staff require training and coaching to become more effective at designing meetings, recruiting participants, facilitating, and aligning community feedback with district policy priorities. Dedicating substantial coursework on communication theories and proven practices in administrator training programs – and even teacher training programs – would sharpen a necessary tool in school districts' governing toolboxes.

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Appendix A: Research Methods

Semi-structured Interviews

I developed multiple semi-structured interview protocols depending on the role of my informant. This was necessary because due to their different roles in the LCFF process, it would not be productive to ask a member of the community the same questions as a superintendent. Semi-structured interviews typically employ a blend of closed- and open-ended questions and are often accompanied by follow-up why or how questions (Adams, 2010).

A qualitative interview attempts to understand informants on their own terms and how they make meaning of their own lives, experiences, and cognitive processes (Brenner, 2006). A strength of collecting data through interviewing is that the interview depends on an interactional relationship because both informant and interviewer are engaged in an on-going process of making meaning (Kvale, 1996). An informant's response depends on how he or she interprets my questions, as well as their previous understanding of the LCFF.

While semi-structured interviews are time intensive, this instrument was ideally suited to this dissertation, as the conversational format helped to paint a detailed picture of how and why engagement opportunities were conceived by districts and how such opportunities were perceived by the community. Interviews also allowed for the ability to ask probing follow-up questions, which often led to useful information that I might not have found otherwise and allowed for both comparisons across districts, as well as opportunities to understand the local context more deeply. After spending so much time observing around the four districts, my questions to informants could become more

specific and yield richer data. For example, after I asked a question, such as, “What does it look like when you hold an LCFF meeting?” I could also ask, what were your expectations for participants when you facilitated such and such an exercise at the last meeting. On a few occasions, interviewees were kind enough to respond to additional probes and follow-up questions that developed while I was analyzing my data.

Appendix B: Interview Protocols

State Adopters and Statewide Advocacy Groups

I am examining how the Local Control Funding Formula created new expectations for how school districts engage parents, community groups, and other members of the public and how these expectations affect who participates in the governance process and the impact that they have. In our interview, I would like to ask you about the construction of the Local Control Funding Formula and how it was intended to be implemented by local districts.

QUESTIONS 1-9 FOCUS ON THE STATE ADOPTION PROCESS. ASK AS APPROPRIATE.

1. Could you briefly describe your involvement in the formulation or adoption of the LCFF

2. What factors explain the adoption of the LCFF

   PROBES: - Were there previous reports or reform efforts that paved the way? What were they

   - Were there political barriers that stood in the way? If so, what were they and how were they overcome

   - Why was the legislature willing to relinquish some of their control over local school districts by giving up most of the categorical funds

3. As I understand the LCFF, there are two main principles: equity and subsidiarity. Was one principle more important than the other

4. How did community engagement become a part of the LCFF

   PROBES: - What was your (or policy makers') intent in including the community engagement aspect

   - Will the parents and other members of the public who are engaged now look different from those who were engaged before the LCFF

   - Is the community engagement piece more of a requirement or expectation

5. Polling data suggests that the most of the public, including parents with children in public schools, have not heard of the LCFF. How is this likely to impact how districts engage the public

6. Do you expect community groups to engage differently than they did before the LCFF

    PROBES: - How will community groups affect who participates in the input processes that districts create

7. What is the purpose of the Local Control and Accountability Plan

    PROBES: - How do you think districts are interpreting its purpose

    - Should it be interpreted as an accountability mechanism

8. How do you expect feedback from the community engagement process to inform the LCAP

    PROBES: - How should we expect districts to collect information from parents, community groups, and other members of the public

    - How will districts know they are hearing preferences that are representative of their community

9. What consequences do you foresee if a community feels that the LCAP does not reflect their input

    PROBES: - What remedies are available

QUESTION 10 FOCUSES ON THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS. ASK AS APPROPRIATE.

10. What feedback are you hearing from the local level about how the implementation is going

    PROBES: - Is there a difference across districts by enrollment size, location, level of concentration factors, and presence of groups

Mobilizers

As you may know, the Local Control Funding Formula gave more control to local districts and also increased the expectations for local districts to engage parents, community groups, and other members of the public in the governing process. I am examining how the Local Control Funding Formula might have changed how school districts engage with stakeholders, such as parents and community groups. In our interview, I would like to ask you about your understanding and involvement in the decisions of your local school district since the first year of LCFF in 2014.

1. Can you tell me a little about your organization and how you have been involved with your school or school district

   PROBES: - What led you to become involved

   - How/when/why did you become involved

   - Are you a membership based group? If so, how many members

2. If you identify a problem with the schools, is there a school/district official that you might contact

   PROBE: - If so, how would you describe your relationship

3. What are your primary sources of information about your school or school district – for example, from your own involvement with the schools; local media; group blogs, newsletters, and reports; official school and district communications; word-of-mouth from other families/school activists

   PROBE: - How often do you use source(s)

4. California's new school funding law, the Local Control Funding Formula requires school districts to seek input from parents in developing their accountability plans for how to allocate resources. Did your school or school district provide you with information about how to become involved? If so, how was the information provided

5. Were you involved in the development of your local school district's accountability plan? How so

6. Did you encourage or organize parents or members of the community to become involved too

PROBES: - How did you communicate with those that you encouraged to participate

- On average, how many people do you communicate with at a time

- Did you have previous relationships with these people before? If so, how had you worked together or interacted in the past

7. On average, how many people responded to your call to participate?

PROBE: - Did this differ depending on the type of event? How

8. How do you explain the LCFF to the parents or members of the community who you are encouraging to participate?

9. Have you noticed any differences in opportunities to participate in school or school district decisions about how funding is being used since the start of the Local Control Funding Formula

PROBES: - How were you and/or your group involved before the LCFF

- Are you and/or your group involved differently now

10. Can you give an example of an issue or problem on which you gave feedback to the district administration or school board

11. What do you feel are the three most serious issues facing your school or school district

PROBES: - Do you know if any of these issues were addressed in the LCAP

- Are you satisfied with how they were addressed

12. Have you attended a meeting in order to give feedback on how you would like to see LCFF money spent

PROBES: - Why did you decide to attend

- What was the meeting like

- Who led the meeting

- What was discussed
- Who presented or talked during the meeting
- Was there time for discussion
- Did you express your opinion
- Did you feel like other participants were respectful of each other
- Did you feel like other participants were open minded
- Was there disagreement? If so, how was it resolved
- Was a consensus reached by the end of the meeting
- Do you feel like your participation made a difference

13. If you have encouraged parents or other members of the community to attend an LCFF related event, did you offer any sort of preparation? If so, please describe what kind of preparation

14. Do you feel like your opinion matters to the school administration and school board

    PROBES:
    - Has this changed since the LCFF
    - (If a positive response) What would you do if you felt like you were not being listened to or your input was not making a difference
    - (If a negative response) Do you plan to do anything about this

15. Is there anything that your school or school district could do to make you more likely to give input

16. Is there anything that your school or school district could do to make parents or other members of the public who are not currently very engaged more likely to give input

Implementers

I am examining how the Local Control Funding Formula created new expectations for how school districts engage their communities and how these expectations affect who participates in the governance process and the impact that they have. In our interview, I would like to ask you about how you have implemented the Local Control Funding Formula.

QUESTIONS 1-4 FOCUS ON THE IMPLEMENTER'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE LCFF. ASK AS APPROPRIATE.

1. What is your role in implementing the LCFF

2. What do you think state policymakers expected to accomplish with the LCFF's focus on parent and community engagement

3. What did they see as the role of local school districts in the engagement process

4. What do you think is the purpose of the Local Control and Accountability Plan *(As there is a strong possibility that accountability will be cognitively interpreted differently, this question is purposefully vague so as not to bias respondents. The probes will be used selectively based on the response)*

    PROBE: - Do you think the LCAP was a useful planning tool? Was it a useful tool for transparency? Was it useful for accountability

QUESTIONS 5-10 FOCUS ON THE PROCESS OF ENGAGEMENT. ASK AS APPROPRIATE.

5. How have you made your parents, community groups, and other members of the public aware of opportunities to engage with the school or district

6. Has the process for how you engage your stakeholders changed since the LCFF

    PROBE: - What are the ways stakeholders engage now versus before

7. What steps have you taken to educate your parents, community groups, and other members of the public about the possibilities and limits of governing under the LCFF

    PROBE: - Do you think your stakeholders are aware that it is intended that students from low-income families, English learners, and foster youth be targeted for extra services

8. What does it look like when you hold an LCFF meeting

PROBE: - When and where is it

- Who shows up and how many
    - Did it seem like participants were organized into groups – in other words, did they seem to be affiliated with specific organizations
    - What neighborhoods seemed to be well represented and what neighborhoods seemed to be lacking representation
- Is there a leader of the meeting? Who is it
- Who talked or presented at the meeting?
- Is there a discussion? If so, what is it like
- Are the participants respectful of others' opinions
- Did the participants seem open minded
- If there is disagreement how is it resolved
- Do the participants reach a consensus

9. Are you aware of parents, community groups, or other members of the public engaging with the district who have not previously been very active

    PROBE: - How can you know if you are reaching new parents or members of the public

10. Are there barriers that some parents must overcome in order to participate, for example, work schedules, transportation, childcare, etc.

    PROBE: - Are there ways that the district can lessen these barriers

QUESTIONS 11-12 FOCUS ON THE IMPACT OF ENGAGEMENT

11. Once you have gathered input from stakeholders, how do you use it

12. Do you think your stakeholders feel like they have contributed to the governing and budgeting process

PROBE: - Do you think your stakeholders are aware of what is in the LCAP

- Do you think your stakeholders recognize their contribution in the LCAP

Appendix C: Survey Instrument

Community Survey

My name is Peter Wright and I am a graduate student at the University of California, Santa Barbara. For my dissertation I am conducting research on participation in school district meetings and how school district decisions are made. By answering the following questions you will be a big help to my research.

I want to assure you that the individual information that you provide will be kept confidential and will be used for my research only. Furthermore, this survey will be maintained in secure files and will be accessible only to me and my academic advisers. Information that identifies individuals will not be released.

How often do you attend meetings where school district policies are discussed?

_____ This is my first time
_____ A few times a year
_____ Once a month
_____ More than once a month

What is your primary source of information about the school district?

Which of the following best describes you:

_____ Parent: how old are your children? _____
_____ District staff (teacher, administrator, other)
_____ Community leader
_____ Interested citizen
_____ Member of an advocacy group

Were you asked by anyone to attend today? If so, who was that?

_____ I was not asked

_____ Family member
_____ Friend
_____ Teacher
_____ A district employee
_____ Community organization
_____ Other _____

Please say why are you attending today's meeting/event

Which of the following statements best describes your opinion?

_____ The school board and superintendent are very responsive to my concerns
_____ The school board and superintendent are sometimes responsive to my concerns
_____ The school board and superintendent are not responsive to my concerns

Is there anything you would like to say about your involvement with the school district or how important decisions are made in the district?

Thanks very much for taking part. Sometimes we find that people like to discuss their experiences and expectations about the school district in more detail. That helps me understand the process more fully. If you would be willing to do this, what is a good email

address or phone number for contact? Of course any discussion would remain confidential.

email _____

phone _____

Name (optional) _____

Please feel free to contact me at (805) 452-1075 or peterwright@umail.ucsb.edu if you have any questions about this survey or my research project.